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Legislative District 43
Baltimore City

Education, Health, and
Environmental Affairs Committee

Chair
Joint Committee on Ending
Homelessness

Chair
Joint Committee on Children,
Youth, and Families



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SUPPORT – HB 754/SB 564 –
Education – High School Graduation Requirements –
Students in Foster Care or Homeless Youth

SB564 works to improve the educational outcomes of youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness by mitigating educational barriers to obtaining a high school diploma.

Youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness are an extremely mobile population. In fact youth in Maryland's foster care system are regularly moved between placement and from schools to schools. On average youth in custody of Maryland's Department of Human Services move an average of 5 times every 1000 days. These constant transitions often result in a loss of school credits, academic problems, and delays in earning a high school diploma.

In Maryland, during the 2017 academic school year, 23 percent of high school youth in foster care attended two schools and 7 percent attended three or more. And in a single school year, 41 percent of homeless children will attend two different schools and 28 percent will attend three or more schools. It is important to note that youth lose approximately 4-6 months of academic progress with each change in school placement and are 50 percent less likely to graduate. This bill is intended to mitigate these negative effects of changing schools by creating equitable graduation requirements for youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness.

Currently in Maryland, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) sets minimum high school graduation standards for the state's school districts (23 credits), but allows school districts flexibility to add additional coursework and credits in order to graduate. This caveat creates additional barriers for youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness. Based on the current framework, it is possible that a youth who is on track and eligible to graduate from Baltimore City Public Schools, but moves to Anne Arundel county at no fault of their own, is then unable to graduate in a reasonable timeframe because they are unable to meet the increased standards their new school district has adopted.

This bill creates equitable graduation requirements by allowing 11th and 12th grade youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness, the ability to graduate by meeting the minimum state graduation requirements if at the time of the school transfer, the student cannot reasonably complete additional local school district graduation requirements.

Additionally, it is important to highlight the relationship between the lack of a high school diploma and homelessness -- 20 percent of the youth that age out of foster care every year, will instantly become homeless and homeless youth who don't receive a high school diploma are at an even greater risk of remaining homeless because their employment opportunities will be limited and it is less likely homeless youth will be able to maintain housing. Passing this bill is fiscally responsible as it will increase graduation rates, combat homelessness, and improve employability for our youth.

Thank you and I ask that you issue a favorable report on SB564.

In Partnership,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mary Washington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mary" being the most prominent.

Mary Washington

For more information, please contact:
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