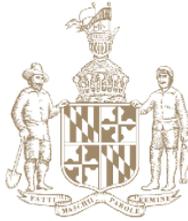


MICHELE GUYTON
Legislative District 42B
Baltimore County

Ways and Means Committee

Education Subcommittee

Finance Resources Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Support HB754

Education – High School Graduation Requirements – Students in Foster Care of Homeless Youth

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of HB754 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 bounced from placement to placement and from school to school. In a single school year, 41 percent of homeless children and 30 per cent of youth in foster care will attend 2 or more schools. These students lose approximately 4-6 months of academic progress with each change in school placement diploma and are 50 percent less likely to graduate than their peers due to a loss of school credits and other academic problems. This bill is intended to mitigate the 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), yet 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 is on track and eligible to graduate from Baltimore City Public Schools, moves to Anne Arundel County at no fault of their own and are unable to graduate in a reasonable timeframe because they are unable to meet the increased standard.

HB754 creates equitable graduation requirements by allowing 11th and 12th grade youth in foster care and youth experiencing homelessness the ability to graduate meeting the minimum state graduation requirements if at the time of school transfer, the youth could not reasonably complete additional local school district graduation requirements.

It is important to highlight the relationship between the lack of a high school diploma and homelessness. 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. Without a

sufficient income, it is less likely homeless youth will be able to maintain housing or pull themselves out of poverty. In addition, more than 23,000 children will age out of the U.S. foster care system every year; 20 percent of these youth will instantly become homeless- a high school diploma will improve this glaring statistic.

I respectfully request a favorable report on HB 754 introduced to increase graduation rates, combat homelessness, and improve employability of our most vulnerable youth.

Thank you,

Delegate Michele Guyton