



Maryland Association of
Resources for Families & Youth

TO: The Honorable Maggie McIntosh, Chair
Members, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Geraldine Valentino-Smith

FROM: Pamela Metz Kasemeyer
Danna L. Kauffman

DATE: February 3, 2021

RE: **SUPPORT** – House Bill 216 – *Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth – Alterations and Reports*

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) is a statewide network of private agencies serving at-risk children and youth and advocates for a system of care in Maryland that meets the needs of children and families. MARFY is a program of Maryland Nonprofits and **supports** the passage of House Bill 216.

House Bill 216 provides meaningful changes to the current tuition exemption program for foster care and homeless youth. The changes proposed broadens the number of youths who may be eligible for the program by redefining eligible homeless youth to include homeless youth as defined in the *McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act* as opposed to the more limited definition of unaccompanied homeless youth. Broadening the definition recognizes that all youth who experience homelessness face the same challenges for success. The legislation expands the benefits under the program to include all expenses required to enroll and also prioritizes access to housing. An appeal process for those youth who apply for tuition exemption and are denied is created to ensure that denials are justified and reflective of errors in applications or unsubstantiated action by an institution. Finally, the bill requires expanded data collection and reporting requirements by public higher education institutions so that the Higher Education Commission can better evaluate the program and its impact.

Many of MARFY’s members are out-of-home placement providers for foster youth and/or administer independent living programs. These providers are acutely aware of the significant challenges faced by both youth who are in foster care or homeless. Access to higher education provides a critical opportunity to support these youth as they struggle to become self-supporting and identify and pursue a path toward success and stability. Furthermore, providing opportunities for housing is critical, not only for homeless youth but also youth in foster care who should be afforded the opportunity to live on campus where the support network for success is likely to be stronger. Passage of House Bill 216 will substantially enhance the State’s commitment to these youth and will undoubtedly result in enhanced life outcomes for the youth afforded the benefits of this program. A favorable report is requested.

For more information call:

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