



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 216

Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth – Alterations and Reports

House Appropriations Committee

February 3, 2021

Submitted by Stacey Jefferson and Julia Gross, Co-Chairs

Member Agencies:

Advocates for Children and Youth
Baltimore Jewish Council
Behavioral Health System Baltimore
CASH Campaign of Maryland
Catholic Charities
Episcopal Diocese of Maryland
Family League of Baltimore
Fuel Fund of Maryland
Health Care for the Homeless
Homeless Persons
Representation Project
Job Opportunities Task Force
League of Women Voters of Maryland
Loyola University Maryland
Maryland Catholic Conference
Maryland Center on Economic Policy
Maryland Community Action
Partnership
Maryland Family Network
Maryland Hunger Solutions
Paul's Place
Public Justice Center
St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore
Welfare Advocates

Marylanders Against Poverty

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Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) strongly supports HB 216, which improves Maryland's tuition waiver for unaccompanied homeless youth. HB 216 conforms waiver eligibility criteria to other states by including accompanied youth, repeals the problematic annual verification requirement, establishes an application and appeal process, and enhances reporting requirements to promote equity and transparency.

The reforms in HB 216 are needed to ensure that Maryland's tuition waiver achieves its purpose of providing college access for youth experiencing homelessness. The legislature established the homeless youth tuition waiver in 2014 with unanimous bipartisan approval, but its impact has been limited in the intervening years. The waiver is currently available only to unaccompanied youth, though youth experiencing homelessness with a parent or guardian face similar challenges to college readiness and access. The annual verification process in the current law causes recipients to lose the waiver if they get housing, which leads to traumatic and unintended returns to homelessness. No other state with a homeless youth tuition waiver limits eligibility to only unaccompanied youth or requires annual verification of homelessness. HB 216 removes these barriers and aligns our tuition waiver with that of other states.

Ensuring college access for youth experiencing homelessness interrupts intergenerational poverty, advances racial equity, and results in long-term cost savings for the State. Maryland's Two-Generation Family Economic Security Commission found that post-secondary education is one of the most effective ways to overcome intergenerational poverty.¹ Intergenerational poverty and homelessness – including youth homelessness – are driven by systemic racism. HB 216 will ensure that youth experiencing homelessness, who are disproportionately Black youth and youth of color, have access to higher education and a pathway out of homelessness and poverty. Investing in college access for youth experiencing homelessness results in considerable savings and increased revenue to the State over time due to reduced unemployment, incarceration, and reliance on government benefits as well as increased earnings. Youth experiencing homelessness must navigate incredible barriers to make it to college – they are among the most talented and hardworking students in our State. The legislature must not allow tuition to be the final barrier that thwarts their educational goals.

MAP appreciates your consideration and urges the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 216.

Marylanders Against Poverty (MAP) is a coalition of service providers, faith communities, and advocacy organizations advancing statewide public policies and programs necessary to alleviate the burdens faced by Marylanders living in or near poverty, and to address the underlying systemic causes of poverty.

¹ See <https://governor.maryland.gov/ltgovernor/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/01/FINAL-Report-Two-Generation-Family-Economic-Security-Commission-12.28.18.pdf>