

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 664
Education—Student Financial Aid—Outreach Plan and Advisory Committee

House Appropriations Committee

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1:30 pm

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Government Relations

The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 664, legislation that would, in part, require high school seniors to meet with a guidance counselor (or other designated school personnel) to receive information about and guidance or assistance with completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA). Included in this legislation is a provision allowing students and their families to opt out of this submission by submitting a form signaling their decision to decline participation.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

According to analysis done by EAB (formerly the Education Advisory Board) and published in a July 2020 report¹, of over 500 thousand students who were admitted to college for Fall 2020, low-income students and students of color were not putting down deposits toward upcoming college costs at a similar rate when compared to previous years. Even more concerning is the fact that those students who did put down a deposit failed to submit a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (or FAFSA) at the same rate as was seen in previous years. These declines are seen most among students with the greatest need.

The data show a 6% year-over-year decline in deposits among students from households with Expected Family Contributions (EFC) below \$10K. For Black students in that income bracket,

¹ Available online at https://eab.com/insights/expert-insight/enrollment/drop-college-enrollment-fafsa-filing-raises-equity-concerns/?utm_source=Deposits&utm_medium=PR (Accessed on January 18, 2021)



deposits are down 12%. Only when EFC rises above \$40K do we stop seeing a decline in deposits. Equally, if not more, concerning, is a trend among deposited students who self-identified on their admissions applications as minorities **and** have annual household incomes less than \$80K—a close proxy for students we anticipate being Pell-eligible or just above the cut-off (EFC up to \$10K). An alarming number of Black and Latinx students (17.5% and 14.9% respectively) who come from homes with annual incomes of less than \$80K have deposited but not submitted the FAFSA as of June 12. Overall, FAFSA first time filings are down 4% since mid-March. The trend is most alarming for low-income and historically underserved minority households. There has been an outsized increase in minority students across all income levels who have not yet applied for federal financial aid. Among students with annual household incomes less than \$80K, Black and Latinx students (comprising 68% of the students in this income bracket) are least likely to file a FAFSA.²

Reporting done by the Washington Post in September 2020 quoted analysis performed by the National College Attainment Network (NCAN) of data through August 2020 that found, “Some 100,000 fewer high school seniors completed financial aid applications to attend college this year....”³ Analysis done by Bill DeBaun, NCAN’s data director who put together their FAFSA Tracker⁴, found that Maryland ranked 11th highest in percentage of seniors completing their FAFSA in 2020: 37.6 percent (or 24,833 seniors). This is compared to the previous cycle where 26,341 Maryland seniors completed the FAFSA—a 5.7 percent decline (or 1,508 fewer seniors), landing our state in 6th place overall. DeBaun posited that, “...[T]his could be a lost generation of low-income students.”⁵

One of the most important jobs Maryland educators have is ensuring that every one of our students receives a world-class education, one that fully prepares them for college, career, and life. We do this by identify the strengths and potential in our students so that we can assist them in fully harnessing and developing those assets in the service of building a brighter future themselves and their communities. If college is their ultimate goal but affording college is an insurmountable challenge, we must do all that we can to assist our students in accessing all of the resources and supports available to them in order to make their goal a reality. By requiring that each and every graduating senior complete either the FAFSA or the MSFAA (or actively choose to decline the opportunity to do so), we are enabling more of our most vulnerable students—particularly those from economically vulnerable families, first generation college

² Ibid

³ Available online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/09/16/college-enrollment-down/?utm_source=Deposits&utm_medium=PR (Accessed on January 18, 2021).

⁴ Available online at <https://formyourfuture.org/fafsa-tracker/> (Accessed on January 18, 2021).

⁵ https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/09/16/college-enrollment-down/?utm_source=Deposits&utm_medium=PR (Accessed on January 18, 2021)



attendees, and BIPOC communities—to gain access to a financial support that could move that which previously may have appeared to be out of reach closer to their grasp.

MSEA has held a longstanding position in opposition of legislatively mandated graduation requirements, believing that the determination of minimum graduation requirements falls within the purview of the Maryland State Board of Education with local boards of education empowered to establish any additional requirements for students within their districts. However, we stand in support of this effort as we believe that the end goal of increasing access and opportunity for an affordable college education is not only a sound policy decision for our state but is one of the most impactful ways in which educators can do our part to provide opportunity and access to college for all of our students regardless of their family's economic circumstances or their ability to afford higher education.

Therefore, MSEA urges a favorable report on Senate Bill 96.