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Bill Number: House Bill 1245

Position: Letter of Information

Title: Guaranteed Access Grant and Next Generation Scholars of Maryland- Alterations

Committee: House Appropriations Committee

Hearing Date: March 16, 2021

Bill Summary:

House Bill 1245 alters the eligibility criteria in the Next Generation Scholars of Maryland program to allow an applicant to pre-qualify for the Guaranteed Access Grant program if the student is eligible for free or reduced price meals.

Information:

In its current form, the proposed legislation uses “free and reduced price meals” as a metric to identify eligible students for the Guaranteed Access Grant program, to be eligible for a free lunch the student’s family can’t earn more than 130 percent of the federal poverty level. To be eligible to receive reduced-price the family incomes must be between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty line. Currently, the Commission uses the same federal poverty level (130 percent) to determine the income eligibility requirements in the Guaranteed Access Grant award program to align with the intent of the program and provide financial assistance to families with the greatest demonstrated need.

The proposed metric to use “free and reduced price meals” may be problematic. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) Program allows the nation’s highest poverty schools and school districts to serve breakfast and lunch at no cost to all enrolled students without collecting household applications. The elimination of the household applications prevents the collection of the necessary information to identify eligible families that meet the income requirements, in order to receive free and reduced price meals. The CEP Program is implemented in several school districts (e.g. Baltimore City) within Maryland.

Since applications are not collected the proposed metric to use “free and reduced price meals” may be problematic. Students enrolled at a school that implemented the CEP Program and receive “free lunch” may be determined eligible for the Guaranteed Access Grant program even if the families’ income exceeds the federal poverty income levels to be eligible for “free and reduced price meals”. Therefore, students whose family income is significantly higher than the federal poverty level (130 percent) would become eligible for the Guaranteed Access Grant program, which does not align with the intent of the program.

For additional information, please contact Ms. Donna Thomas, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance at donnae.thomas@maryland.gov.