

Members of the Senate's Budget and Taxation Committee,

It is with absolute conviction that I give my strongest possible testimony in favor of SB904 this session. As a university student, community college alumni, and dedicated Marylander, I enthusiastically support SB904 and the economic relief that it offers Maryland students.

Like many Marylanders, I lacked the financial means to pursue my education. After completing my high school studies, I was left with few higher education opportunities and limited financial aid. My path led me to my local community college, where I excelled as a student, leader, researcher, conference presenter, and author. Through my academic and professional work, I earned a scholarship to Maryland's flagship institution in College Park and began studying on a medical track. During this period of growth, I, like many other Marylanders, continued to face financial barriers in accessing an affordable education. I was often unable to cover school expenses and rarely purchased required textbooks for classes in order to save money. My status as a minority student likely increased this circumstance, requiring me to financially account for every aspect of my education. At times, this included being aware of every dollar that was being invested in my undergraduate education and future career.

The issue of textbook cost is a widely expressed, and often neglected, issue that students of this and future generations face. Students will routinely pay substantial percentages of their class expenses on the books required to participate in their coursework. This leads students to lean on colleagues for support or accept additional debt in order to complete their course of study. It is a fundamental educational issue felt by all students, in all institutions, and is often reported as a tremendous obstacle.

By supporting SB904, this legislation is putting dollars back into the pockets of every Maryland student, regardless of class, age, or circumstance, and it will allow our hardworking and passionate college students far greater access and success in higher education. While I strongly believe that this long-term need necessitates action, the underlying and powerful implications of our pandemic also play a key factor in this bill. Many Maryland students lost on-campus jobs, paid internships, or stipends as a result of the shutdown. Furthermore, many did not receive stimulus checks as their parents claimed them as dependents--disqualifying them from aid.

Maryland students are committed to educational excellence and are purpose driven individuals that engage and push society forward. While the issues surrounding educational access are broad, this legislation aims to resolve a massive barrier on a practical scale. While it is often easier to detach and focus on the price tag associated with lowering the cost of education, it is essential to remember the group that this legislation is supporting: Marylanders. This is not a tax break for rich and wealthy students, nor is it designed to make college an expense free venture. Your support for this bill relieves perhaps the most basic cost associated with education and establishes a platform where students can graduate with less debt and, therefore, contribute to a growing Maryland economy and prosperous state.

Sincerely,

Kyle Dineen