

Members of the Maryland General Assembly Committee,

It is with absolute conviction that I give my strongest possible testimony of HB0792 this session. As a university student, community college alumni, and dedicated Marylander, I enthusiastically support HB0792 and the economic relief that it offers students.

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

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

By supporting HB0792, 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 to 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--therefore 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 or focus on the price tag of lowering the overall student 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 aid and 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, can contribute to a growing economy and prosperous state.

Sincerely,

Kyle Dineen