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Testimony in **support** of House Bill 96
Education-High School Graduation Requirements-Application
Maryland House of Delegates
Ways and Means Committee
Delegate Anne Kaiser, Chair
January 20, 2021

Thank you, Delegate Kaiser, for the opportunity to speak on this important legislation.

Thank you to Delegates Solomon and Rosenberg for advancing this bill.

During these most uncertain times, I ask you to support legislation to help make a college education more certain for Maryland residents.

I strongly urge the committee to adopt House Bill 96 to make the completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) a requirement.

This requirement, paired with the new changes coming because of recent action on Capitol Hill to dramatically simplify and expand access to federal financial aid, will put the dream of a college education within the grasp of so many more.

This committee knows well the challenges many students face in affording a postsecondary education.

You know that, nationally, less than eight percent of students from the lowest income quartile complete college in a timely fashion.

You know that the hard-working part-time student often does not complete. National data says that less than eight percent of such students complete an associate's degree within four years of high school graduation.

You know that making ends meet is a challenge for a growing number of families—it takes \$90,000 income for a family of four to make ends meet in Montgomery County.

You also know jobs go unfilled in Maryland for lack of skilled talent—jobs of the future require postsecondary education. Even today, Maryland's biotech companies scrambling to develop vaccines are scrambling to find talent to do the work.

That is why you adopted the Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship for which we are grateful—to enable more families to afford that college education and close the skill gaps—to build a homegrown talent pipeline that expands opportunity and fuels our economy.

Here is the problem: many families do not think college is even a glimmer of possibility for their child. Some are worried the costs are out of reach. Some are daunted by the process. Some are just too busy working to make ends meet to worry about the future.

This is even truer in the middle of a pandemic. Who can worry about going to college if you are out of work and struggling to make ends meet?

MC tries to overcome these barriers through direct outreach, collaboration with high school counselors, and events to educate parents and families about the FAFSA.

During this crisis, we have enhanced our outreach and converted to online advising.

Additionally, the College's ACES coaches who remain virtually embedded in 14 high schools in Montgomery County work not only with their students but also with their families. Coaches spend time with parents helping them to understand the value of college, demystifying the application process, and helping them complete the FAFSA.

Unfortunately, none of this is enough.

I know because as a young woman I had big dreams. I know because I had a dedicated but over-worked and proud single parent, my father. I know because a completed FAFSA seemed improbable for me. However, I knew it was my golden ticket.

With the adoption of this legislation, more students will complete the FAFSA and **know** they can afford college, more students will attend college, and more students will join the talent pool—and, like my family, forever change the trajectory of their lives.

This legislation is more relevant today as we deliberate issues of justice. As we move to reshape our communities to be more inclusive and equitable, access to education must be part of the solution. It is even

more relevant as we think about how to rebound—not simply recover—from this public health crisis that has laid bare the inequities that still plague our society.

Think about the barriers you can bring down—the doors you can open with the stroke of a pen, with the adoption of this simple, yet powerful legislation.

Help us to continue to open ever wider the doors of opportunity, expand economic mobility, and create an ever-expanding homegrown talent pool.

Let's help create more MC alumni like Sol Graham.

Sol's life and that of his family has forever changed thanks to the education he obtained in Maryland.

After earning his education, Sol went on to found Quality Biologics and become an industry leader. Today his daughter runs the company and Sol is a philanthropist—helping more students get a degree and change their lives. In fact, thanks to our partnership with Quality Biological, MC is in the midst of operating a biotech boot camp to get workers who found themselves unemployed because of the pandemic into much-needed jobs in the biotech industry.

Moreover, I know I am here speaking before you as the Montgomery College President because my father finally completed my FAFSA.

Please vote to give House Bill 96 a favorable report.

Thank you—and thank you for your leadership during this very challenging time for our State.