



**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB96**  
**Education - High School Graduation Requirements - Application**  
Ways and Means Committee  
Maritza Solano on Behalf of CASA

January 20, 2021

Dear Chair Kaiser and Members of the Committee:

CASA is pleased to provide testimony in support of HB96. CASA is the largest immigrant services and advocacy organization both in Maryland and in the mid-atlantic region. CASA is a membership based organization with a membership of over 100,000 Black and Latinx immigrants and working families. In addition to legal, tax, health and employment services - CASA works with students and parents all over Maryland through a variety of ESOL and afterschool programs.

There is no question that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black and Latinx immigrants in a variety of different ways including educational outcomes. With students of color, especially first generation and those living in poverty, already having lower rates of post secondary enrollment and completion - the pandemic has exacerbated an already troubling disparity.

Our offices have been supporting our membership through the very difficult challenge of completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for many years now and most recently, the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA); we understand firsthand the drastic increase in likelihood of students attending college due to the completion of these forms. We believe that this bill would be a tremendous support for low-income families that often miss out on thousands of dollars of federal and state financial aid.

HB96, in addition to requiring each public school student to submit the FAFSA and MSFAA, requires MSDE and MHEC to establish an advisory committee composed of school counselors and administrators, community based college assistance groups, high school and college students, and high education officials that would work on developing best practices, recommendations, materials, and toolkits to carry out this requirement. The support from this advisory committee is key in the success of this bill and the overall result of more students successfully completing the FAFSA and MSFAA applications. Finally, this bill does not place an unfair burden or any negative impact on students who are not able to complete the form due to a parent being unable to or a student being in a unique position not to.

For the reasons outlined above, CASA requests a favorable decision from the committee on HB96.

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