

HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

January 20, 2021

TESTIMONY

Submitted by
Dr. Falecia Williams, President

HB 96 – Education – High School Graduation Requirements – Application

Position: Favorable

As the President of Prince George's County Community College ("PGCCC") and on behalf of Maryland's 15 other community colleges, we strongly support HB96 which will foster a cultural change for Maryland's high school graduates by expecting them to complete and submit the Free Application for Federal Student Aid ("FAFSA") or the Maryland State Financial Aid application ("MSFAA"). PGCCC's student population includes many first-generation college students who were not aware of their eligibility for financial aid. The completion and filing of these forms may provide life a altering opportunity to many high school graduates through their pursuit of post secondary education for degree completion, licensure, certification and/or skilled training.

The identification of financial assistance availability prior to graduation will assist students and their families in making a commitment to pursue higher education. This pursuit constitutes a material benefit to these students and our state. Taking full advantage of the available assistance will also allow these students to complete their pursuit of a college degree or enhanced skill credentials which provide a sustainable living wage. Students and families will be able to plan for their financial commitments until graduation. Without this assistance many students have a year by year perspective dependent upon their or their families' finances.

Louisiana, which was first to enact this legislation, has reported a 26% increase in the number of students filing the FAFSA over the previous year. There is a proven high correlation between the implementation of this policy and stronger enrollment outcomes for seniors graduating in 2018 (Source: National College Access Network). We expect this correlation to continue each year. Texas and Illinois passed similar legislation in 2019. Many other states and jurisdictions are considering this legislation.

HB96 provides students, parents, or legal guardians the opportunity to opt out of completing these forms. To do so requires that they acknowledge that they understand the

FAFSA or the MSFAA and that they expressly decline to complete the form(s). The legislation will ensure that students will either knowingly refuse to request assistance or understand that these applications are their access to assistance resources. These benefits can be provided with minor administrative costs or commitments. The proposed legislation will not prevent students from graduating.

Our collective goal is to provide opportunity and access for every Maryland high school student to pursue their higher education goals. Ensuring that these students have the opportunity to take advantage of available financial assistance is of the utmost importance to successful degree completion or postsecondary training and certification.

In conclusion, this proposed legislation benefits both Maryland and our students. Every financial resource available to assist our students' path to postsecondary education that leads to degree completion or workforce skill enhancement is essential. This legislation will make a difference.