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### **HB 734 – SUPPORT**

## **“Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance- Alterations and Appropriations”**

House Appropriations Committee  
February 18, 2022

CollegeTracks submits this written testimony in support of HB 734 which addresses, in part, the Guaranteed Access Grant for students attending institutions of higher learning in the state of Maryland. Specifically, we support the provision that allows for students who have qualified for and received the Guaranteed Access Grant to remain eligible if there is a change in their family income by reducing the grant amount based on their new income, instead of losing their grant in its entirety.

CollegeTracks is a non-profit organization in Montgomery County that works in partnership with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). Our mission is to empower first-generation-to-college students and students from low-income and immigrant households in Montgomery County, Maryland by helping them bridge systemic opportunity gaps with enough support to get to and through postsecondary education and on a career pathway.

We strongly believe that all young people in Maryland deserve the opportunity to pursue higher education, if they choose, and to have access to as much financial aid as they need to do so. For Maryland students from low-income households, the Guaranteed Access Grant can be the difference between earning a higher education credential or not. In 2021 CollegeTracks worked with 123 high school seniors who were awarded the Guaranteed Access Grant. Of these, 116 chose to attend a Maryland institution of higher education, in part because the Guaranteed Access Grant meant they could afford it.

The largest impediment to a student completing their postsecondary education is financial pressure.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, we have worked with students who have lost their Guaranteed Access Grant because their families’ income rose above the limit. This includes students who are working full-time to help cover their college expenses and the increase in their own earnings impacted the household income. For most of these students, the loss of their Guaranteed Access Grant jeopardized their ability to afford college, to stay in school, and complete their degree.

HB 734 takes important steps towards ensuring that those who have the most financial need in Maryland are given the assistance they need to pursue higher education, get on a career pathway, and continue contributing to a thriving state economy, instead of being penalized by a small increase in family income.

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<sup>1</sup> 38% according to a Signal Vine presentation, Reflect Resilience, February 3, 2022.