

HB0385: Maryland Economic Development Corporation – Student Housing Requirements – Leases and Health or Safety Emergencies

House Hearing - 2/8/2022 at 1 p.m.

Synopsis: Requiring residential leases between the Maryland Economic Development Corporation and certain students living in student housing owned by the Corporation to be presented in a certain manner and include a certain notice; requiring the Corporation to give certain notice and abide by certain protocols regarding University System of Maryland students living in student housing owned by the Corporation if the University closes the institution or center the student attends due to a health or safety emergency; and applying the Act prospectively.

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I encourage the General Assembly to adopt this legislation primarily for the benefit of Maryland students and their families. The USM institutions will also benefit because this legislation will solidify their role in making decisions about campus operations and closures during health or safety emergencies. MEDCO will even benefit from this legislation due to the clarifications of their role in student housing for the USM.

MEDCO provides a beneficial service to the state and its residents. In March 2020 when Towson University moved to on-line instruction and closed their dorms due to COVID, MEDCO made a good decision to follow their lead, close their dorms, and provide prorated housing refunds to students. However, in the summer and fall of 2020 when the USM campuses were in various states of in-person and on-line instruction, MEDCO made a series of poor decisions in providing reasonable flexibility to students for modifying their housing leases. These poor decisions placed an undue financial burden on students, and probably lead to some poor public health decisions.

Eventually, leaders from MEDCO, USM, and state government came together on a resolution for most of the financial matters. However, this took significant pressure from students, parents, legislators, and other state leaders. For six months, the students' burden and outcries were essentially used as a negotiating tactic by MEDCO and the USM administrations. This legislation will clarify that during health and safety emergencies, Maryland's leaders are expected to act for the benefit of students and families on day one. More specifically, MEDCO is to follow USM decisions during emergencies on what actions are best for each university community.