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Environment and Transportation
Committee

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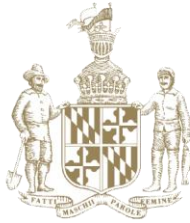
Land Use and Ethics Subcommittee

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on Ending
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Co-Chair

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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB 734

Higher Education - Student Financial Assistance - Alterations and Appropriation
Appropriations Committee * February 22, 2022

What this bill does

This bill improves access to higher education for students in Maryland by increasing funding to our state's two major financial aid programs: the Educational Excellence Award and the Guaranteed Access Grant.

The Next Generation Scholars Maryland Program

This program helps students graduate from high school and get ready for college. The State Department of Education (MSDE) awards grants to nonprofits, businesses, and institutions of higher education to administer the program. These organizations work with students to develop: a high school graduation plan, internships, skills to navigate financial aid, career interests, mentorship opportunities, and a plan to graduate from college.

- The bill addresses a disagreement between MSDE and Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) about the implementation of the Next Generation Scholars Maryland program. Students *pre-qualify* for this program in 8th, 9th, or 10th grade. The bill clarifies that determination of family income required for this program be based on the year that the student qualified, not when they matriculate.
- The bill enables organizations administering the Next Generation Scholars Program to continue providing services to students while in college (focused on retention).

The Delegate Howard P Rawlings Program

This program consists of Guaranteed Access Grants that are awarded to the neediest students to ensure that 100 percent of educational costs, and Educational Assistance Grants that are awarded to low and moderate income students to assist in paying educational costs.

- The bill increases the maximum award for an education assistance grant from \$3,000 to \$7,000 to reflect cost of living and tuition increases over the years since it was created.
- The bill requires that, if a guaranteed access grant needs to be adjusted based on changes to family income, it shall be done on a sliding scale basis, as developed by the MHEC with input from the Financial Aid Advisory Council.
- The bill mandates an appropriation of at least \$112,000,000 in the Governor's annual budget bill for the Howard P Rawlings Education Excellence Awards. *(Based on a drafting error, the original bill included at least a \$75,000,000 annual appropriation. A sponsor amendment corrected the error).*

Why this bill matters

Expanding access to affordable education is critical for the success of our youth - the future leaders of our state. As costs of college rise, the State must react and do what it takes to help students to achieve their academic goals.

This bill would increase scholarship programs to ensure that students get to *and through* college. Particularly for students from low-income families, getting into college is only half of the battle – retention and success in higher education is a major issue. Vulnerable students need *both* social support and financial support to make college a reality. This bill addresses both of these needs by: (1) enabling the Next Generation Scholars Maryland Program to continue its support of students *through* college, (2) increasing scholarship caps for higher education, (3) increasing the overall pool of money for Howard P Rawlings Education Excellence Awards, and (4) ensuring that there is no benefits cliff associated with a change in family income.

I urge you to vote favorably on HB734.