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HOUSE BILL 648 SUPPORT FOR APPROVAL

The Maryland Business Roundtable for Education (MBRT), a 30-year nonprofit organization that has played an active role in supporting excellence and accountability in K-12 education, urges passage of House Bill 648 as submitted by Delegate Alonzo Washington. This bill would increase program funding for the Maryland Higher Education Outreach and College Access Program to support nonprofits whose work focuses on encouraging and supporting low-income high school students to attend and complete college.

These programs are a vital stopgap supporting a statewide infrastructure that assists low-income families from vulnerable groups by completing the FAFSA and applying, enrolling, and graduating from college. Unfortunately, the lack of a formal program in Maryland has created a void directly reflected in the low levels (and declining rates) of FAFSA completion and college enrollment for students from low-income families. Often, even minor issues ultimately create roadblocks for these students if they are not provided step-by-step assistance navigating the complicated college and financial aid processes. House Bill 648 incorporates these recommendations by strengthening the overall impact of the State's support and utilization of nonprofits to increase opportunities by Maryland's low-income students to obtain a postsecondary degree.

The current language recognizes that potential nonprofit partners must satisfy the following minimum criteria:

- Nonprofit partners must have already established partnership(s) with local school systems or higher education institutions;
- They must provide college access activities, communication, and services with a proven track record of success, and;
- Must offer services to enhance and increase college access and completion for low-income 11th and 12th grade Maryland high school students.

HB 648 will ensure that underserved students are provided with appropriate interventions designed to support their college dreams by helping them take the first step in securing college funding. Under these programs, students are made aware of state and federal financial resources like the FAFSA and Howard P. Rawlings Guaranteed Access (GA) grant. However, their awareness is only part of the equation, and students and their families often need a more substantial level of involvement to complete the financial aid process and increase their access to Maryland Higher Education funding streams.

Recent data shows that Maryland is experiencing a decline in FAFSA completion and immediate college enrollment, primarily impacting students from low-income families. A trend that must be reversed if Maryland is to meet its 2025 goal of 55%-degree attainment. Supporting these programs and resources



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to increase college enrollment is a viable solution for policymakers to immediately intervene to improve the overall college enrollment rate. Stalled enrollments can often be attributed to other areas of life, such as work, finances, and family, which distract students from pursuing a postsecondary education.¹ Another concern is the widening gap between students from schools with an abundance versus a scarcity of resources. HB 648 will ensure that college-access focused nonprofit organizations will continue or expand their reach in providing underserved students the appropriate level of support and intervention.

The anticipated outcomes are corroborated by the Next Generation Scholars program launched in 2017. As one of the leading grant partners, MBRT has served nearly 2,000 low-income and, in many cases, first-generation students with an extensive suite of high-touch college and career-based experiences in Allegany, Caroline, Dorchester, Kent, and Wicomico Counties. The MBRT NGS programs continue to evolve, but their programs are designed to encourage students to identify and pursue potential career interests through a combination of activities such as volunteer learning engagements, workforce opportunities, and other interventions. All of these are provided by our embedded MBRT coordinator in the local school district, whose support and encouragement are vital to student participation. So far, our data indicates that students who frequently participate in NGS activities or interact with the local NGS coordinators have shown significant gains in the following areas.

- Attendance (2% higher than overall NGS peers),
- Credit-earning (outperforming the overall student body by 0.25%),
- Academic classroom performance (GPA 2.37 matching the exact overall school profile GPA),
- And have outperformed their non-NGS peers in both attendance and classroom performance in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades.

Additionally, evidence suggests strong interpersonal relationships cultivated by MBRT Coordinators combined with the broad exposures to college and career options have enabled many more young people to enroll in higher education or another postsecondary option. Very encouraging findings, considering that many of these students belong to vulnerable groups responsible for the most significant increase in dropout rates, which underscores the importance of expanding the resources available for underserved students statewide through the passage of HB 648.

Most sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Dulay".

Brian Dulay
Executive Director

¹ National Student Clearinghouse Research Center; High School Benchmarks, December 2021