



APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY

Submitted by Dr. Brad Phillips, Executive Director

February 22, 2022

HB 734 – Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Alterations and Appropriation

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges, representing Maryland's 16 public two-year institutions of postsecondary education, offers our support for HB 734 that provides a more equitable award process for students who have qualified and received the Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Awards. These awards are the State's need-based financial aid grants, which are comprised of the Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant and the Educational Assistance (EA) Grant.

The GA Grants go to students whose family income is below a designated poverty index and who meet the academic requirements of the grant. However, should the family income change during a student's postsecondary tenure, the student can be denied the scholarship in following years, forcing students to borrow funds, delay enrollment or permanently forego their academic pursuit. This legislation permits the Maryland Higher Education Commission to use a sliding scale to recalculate the grant and to continue to award qualifying students.

This legislation also expands the EA awards from \$3,000 to \$7,000, which will assist community colleges students with remaining unmet need. Community college students utilize the EA awards and as the State's largest need-based financial aid program, this will increase the amount to be more aligned with the needs of our students.

Community colleges also support giving the Maryland Higher Education Commission the authority to determine financial need for students to qualify for the 2+2 Transfer Scholarship. The 2 +2 Transfer Scholarship offers the Community College Promise recipients who transfer to a Maryland four-year institution with an associate degree with an opportunity to receive scholarship aid upon transfer.

These enhancements to the State's need-based awards will help substantially. Yet criteria around credit-completion that have been added to receiving these awards have had a negative impact on student's ability to maintain these awards. As a result of the College Affordability Act of 2016, the credit completion requirements have resulted in 65% of our students becoming

ineligible for the EEA awards in the subsequent year, according to the Maryland Higher Education Commission. This is devastating to our students and their educational attainment even though the policy changes were designed to encourage completion and shorten the time to degree. The majority of community college students are working adults, with the average age of 25 and over half are working 20 hours or more a week. Requiring them to be full-time students and complete 15 credits per semester has altered their ability to work, provide for their families, and achieve the necessary requirements for maintaining their EA awards. These criteria have become a barrier to success for our students and are resulting in greater inequity in our higher education system.

MACC realizes the intent of this legislation is not to resolve these concerns, yet we want to bring this issue to your attention as you look to future solutions for helping students who really are attempting to improve their quality of life yet struggle with policies that are designed for first-time full-time recent high school graduates.

Maryland's community colleges support this legislation and ask that the Committee give it a favorable report.