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Finance Committee

Joint Committees

Children, Youth, and Families

Ending Homelessness

Fair Practices and State Personnel Oversight

Management of Public Funds

Protocol



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony of Senator Joanne C. Benson

SB 904: Maryland Higher Education Commission - Formerly Incarcerated Youth Grant Program – Established

Good afternoon Chair Guzzone, Vice-Chair Rosapepe, and The Budget and Taxation Committee members. I am here to present SB904 Maryland Higher Education Commission - Formerly Incarcerated Youth Grant Program - Established.

This legislation is essential to provide better access to higher education for at-risk youth. The school-to-prison pipeline is something that many youths have encountered. This pipeline alludes to the school's disciplinary procedures, such as suspensions or expulsions. These practices remove the student from the learning environment and places them in the juvenile criminal justice system. In addition, students of color and students with disabilities are most impacted by these policies. They are disproportionately suspended and expelled at a higher rate than their counterparts. Once young people are incarcerated as youth, they are very likely to be incarcerated as adults. The need to decrease the chance of youth becoming re-incarcerated as they reach adulthood requires infrastructure to be put into place. There needs to be access to higher education no matter the adolescents' past.

This bill's purpose is to lay out a Formerly Incarcerated Youth Grant Program to be administered by the Office of Student Financial Assistance inside the Maryland Higher Education Commission. The establishment of this program is vital in allowing our formerly incarcerated youth a better chance at higher education. Higher education will deter them from going down the wrong path and open them to many opportunities for a better future.

Thus, I respectfully urge the committee to issue a favorable report for SB904.