

February 24, 2023

Dear Senators and Delegates,

I have always known I would go to college. I didn't know what I wanted to be. I didn't know the first steps I needed to take and there is only so much you can ask Google.

Since my parents have never been through this type of transition. From high school in the United States to college, they didn't know what it was like to not know the path to take, they couldn't guide me in choosing a major, they couldn't comfort me the way I needed and most importantly, as a first-generation student, they couldn't provide the financial aid we as a family would need for me to get a higher education.

I remember when I got my graduation cap and gown in the summer of 2022, how I needed to look up on YouTube how to attach a tassel to a cap.

As I was doing this, I felt an overpowering feeling of pride, and it was all because I didn't do it alone.

My first-generation counselor was Mrs. Onokoko. She was there for me, more than even I could say about my high school counselor. At every step, she was there. FGCB was there to remind me to do my FAFSA before my school could inform us of that. They helped me in filling it out. Mrs. Onokoko would stay on the call with me for hours when necessary, helping me calculate a tax return I'd never seen or touched because I never took a financial literacy task and my parents didn't know how to use FAFSA, especially since I was the firstborn.

Mrs. Onokoko helped me decide the types of schools that I should be applying to. Mrs. Onokoko told me that I didn't need to have my major figured out right at that moment, saving me from crumbling under the stress of not knowing and feeling like I was behind. Mrs. Onokoko motivated me with her own stories of the college application and decision process, how difficult it was, and how she didn't understand why certain colleges didn't accept her when she was a good student. She informed me about MD caps and then district senate scholarships. Without her help. Without FGCB's help and representation in my life. I would become another statistic. Stuck taking out a loan that would cripple me and hold my family back. They showed me where to go, and one of those places was towards the GA Grant.

The GA grant is the most important, impactful, and life-saving gift that the state of Maryland could ever provide to a person that is just wanting to be and do better with their life. I would constantly fear that my need for tuition and housing at my college would drive my family apart because I wasn't the only child, we had family back in Nigeria looking up to us and expecting us to help provide financially as well. They wanted to act strong in front of me, but I knew. And it was a looming observation and realization that followed me throughout my high school career. FGCB guided me to follow the path I wanted, they directed me to the GA grant by helping with the financial aid process and after finding out I was eligible, the questions I had about it that I

told Mrs. Onokoko about would not go on answered. She would call MDCAPS and make a three-way call with me involved, making sure I was aware of my resources and confident within them.

I am sitting here typing this in my Towson University Dorm, as a pre-business marketing major and a computer science minor, because of FGCB and the GA grant. I am at a place where I love, learning about the things that I love, something I didn't make the conclusion to do until I took Mrs. Onokoko's words to heart and lived my life without stress and worry, and things just clicked. I can afford the things that I love and have a chance at doing them for the rest of my life because of the GA grant.

I couldn't be more thankful, my parents can't be more thankful, and my siblings couldn't be more hopeful that an opportunity and organization like this will continue to be around when it is their turn to attach their tassels to their graduation cap, with me as a guide instead of a video. I hope more people can get the chances that I have gotten.

With Great sincerity,

Mary.