

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
THURSDAY, March 16, 2023
HB 1129

Good afternoon. I am pleased to testify for House Bill 1129 with the amendment not requiring a financial match.

I am Deja Cobbs, the Director of Programs at First Generation College Bound. First Generation College Bound is a non-profit organization that serves high school students in Prince George's County for the past 32 years. FGCB makes a long-term commitment to the young people we serve for them to attend and most importantly graduate college.

Our organization works with students and their families to navigate the complicated processes of preparing and applying for college. A critical part of this process is applying for financial aid. As we know, navigating through the financial aid process is very difficult, particularly for students who are the first in their families to attend college. Many of our students are recipients of state grants and even your legislative scholarships, but for students to complete the process to receive this funding we have to work very closely with our families, students, and the Office of Student Financial Assistance of the Maryland Higher Education Commission(MHEC). Over the past 32 years, we have assisted 2,639 students who have entered college, 964 who have graduated, and there are another 1,549 currently in college.

Since year one our CEO and founder have been removing barriers for low-income students to go to college and graduate. This fight continues today as we still see many graduating seniors not knowing how to apply for financial aid. Some believe if the student performs well academically that they should know how to complete the process to get into college. However, this is not the case because those same students still need advice, encouragement, and support to graduate from college. As you will hear today from our student's testimonies it was because of outreach funding we were able to help students who did not attend our high schools get the Guaranteed Access Grant. According to the Maryland Higher Education Commission Office of Student Financial Assistance, only 32% of

first-time GA potentially eligible students received the GA grant in 2021. Many of the students and their families never heard of MHEC or knew about the state grants they were eligible to receive. This is where our outreach efforts go, to increase the knowledge of state grants and scholarships for eligible students to receive the funding they need to attend college.

As you know in 2020 our world shut down due to COVID-19, this impacted many graduating seniors. Due to outreach efforts, FGCB was still able to serve 316 students from 2020-2022. In 2022 alone we served 186 students who received a total of 2.3 million dollars in financial aid. This again was due to outreach funding and the efforts of meeting our students where they are as you will hear today.

Due to the recent legislation passed regarding FAFSA completion in the state of Maryland, outreach funding enabled us to provide FAFSA outreach in our 7 high schools located in Prince George's County. Before the March 1st deadline we were able to speak with seniors about why completing the FAFSA is important. We also assisted our 7 high schools with seniors understanding how to apply for legislative scholarships, how to create an MDCAPS account, and how to complete the Maryland State Financial Aid Application, (MSFAA). Although we were able to do this in 7 high schools many other schools in and around Prince George's county are challenged with FAFSA completion, MSFAA completion, and understanding state grants/ scholarships. The increase in outreach funding will allow us to speak with many other seniors in other schools about the FAFSA, MSFAA, and MDCAPS. This will also help students apply for legislative scholarships which many are not aware of.

First Generation College Bound and many other organizations like ours would not be able to assist students with understanding the financial aid process, in order to attend college and most importantly graduate from state institutions. The increase in funding will allow us to help many low-income students and not just a few.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the amendment for HB 1129.