

# TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 13<sup>th</sup> 2024

HB 624

Good afternoon,

I am Deja Cobbs, the Director of Program Services at First Generation College Bound. I am here in support of HB 624 with amendments for the Next Generation Scholars Program to be administered by The Maryland Higher Education Commission.

First Generation College Bound is a non-profit organization working in Prince George's County for almost 33 years. First Generation College Bound provides comprehensive support to students from low-income families to enroll and graduate from college. Our organizations work 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. From the time we enroll students we are able to identify what state need base scholarships and/or grants they will be eligible for. This is where our outreach efforts go, to increase the knowledge of the financial aid process to low income students. This includes the state grants and scholarships offered through the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

In order 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. It takes time to build the trusting relationship with our students and their families in order for them to complete the financial aid process even while in college. Over the past 33 years, we have assisted 2,813 students who have entered college, 1,103 who have graduated from college, and there are another 1,871 currently in college. In our high school graduating class of 2023 they received 3.4 million dollars in financial aid and 951,400 in state grants.

Due to the recent state legislation passed regarding FAFSA completion, we provided FAFSA information sessions in our 8 high schools located in Prince George's county. 1,111 seniors were able to gain an understanding of how to apply for legislative scholarships, create an MDCAPS account, and complete the Maryland State Financial Aid Application, (MSFAA).

First Generation College Bound wants to work collaboratively with the Maryland Higher Education Commission in providing the outreach to support our low income students in leveraging state financial aid to attend an affordable college and graduate.