



Witness Statement

HB0811 | Higher Education - Financial Well-Being Pilot Program - Establishment | Delegate Wolek

Good Afternoon,

My name is Dr. Keia Brown, a 15-year financial aid administrator, first-generation college graduate, and founder of a non-profit organization. As a full-time higher education professional, I am unable to be present on Tuesday, February 20, 2024, for the formal hearing. However, I am in full support of HB0811 and its focus is to enact a pilot program for college student's financial well-being.

In my professional roles, I have had the privilege to work with students and their families across the country to assist them in understanding their financial obligations while in college and after graduation. One thing that has been undoubtedly obvious to me is the heavy want from students to comprehend challenging federal student aid processes and a desire to be better prepared for their future upon graduation. The cost of college has increased by 65% in the last twenty years; therefore, students are hungry to find ways to help obtain a college degree, the American Dream, a reality without suffering costly student debt. First-generation college students, especially, take on the tasks of learning and navigating the process of financing their education, whether it be correct or not, for the first time and often without a parent or guardian's to assist. This leads to the power of having a coach or mentor to guide them to the right path.

Financial Literacy is a key component of the mission and values that make The Miss Collegiate USA Organization (MCUO), a non-profit based in Maryland, vital to the success of the young women we mentor throughout our financial literacy program nationwide. Our community of young women includes those who are college-bound, current college students, and college graduates who are navigating the financial journeys in their higher education and professional careers. Our non-profit financial literacy program, CrownWi\$e offers free webinars and information sessions for our community to meet with leaders in the higher education industry, specifically financial aid professionals. And while these events are held throughout the year, the impacts of their existence are substantial to those who attend.

With the support of financial literacy and wellness programs across Maryland college campuses, students will have a greater opportunity to seek out assistance for mentorship and guidance that will lead them to financial success and freedom. I ask that the committee consider HB0811.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Keia A. Brown, Ed.D.
Founder & President | Miss Collegiate USA Organization
keia@misscollegiateusa.org

