

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB637

Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out of State Tuition Exemption Eligibility

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Date: February 23, 2024

Position: Support

Good afternoon,

My name is Jacqueline Alyea and I am a School Counselor at Owings Mills High School in Owings Mills, Maryland. I strongly support House Bill SB637 Higher Education- Undocumented Students- Out of State Tuition Exemption Eligibility.

I am a counselor in a school where about one quarter of students are undocumented. I am responsible for connecting all students with a plan after graduation. I cannot connect undocumented students with military options, jobs right out of high school, or even apprenticeship or trade programs with a work component. College is the only option for undocumented students, and it is not easily accessible for all. As it stands, a student or their parent must have paid taxes for three years prior to graduating to be eligible for the Dream Act, which qualifies students both for in-state tuition and for state financial aid eligibility. If students don't have three years, they are charged out-of-state or even international student prices, sometimes tripling the cost, while having no access to aid. This renders college an impossible option. I find it hard to understand the point of educating undocumented children in K-12 without the hope of them going on to pursue their dreams and become productive members of Maryland's economy.

I have worked closely with a student, John (name changed for privacy), for two years now. His dream is to become a teacher. He has a 3.5 GPA, and has already taken CCBC classes through the dual enrollment program. However, John moved from out of state two years ago and does not have three years of his parents' taxes to submit to qualify for the Dream Act. He will graduate with no plan, in hopes of finding a job somewhere and encouraging his mom to file her taxes for one more year. At that point, without the support of his school and counseling team, he will be attempting to navigate the incredibly tricky and often contradictory process of applying for the MSFAA and pursuing a college experience under the Dream Act. I have worked with many students to navigate this process- and even as a professional counselor whose first language is English, it is very confusing. I have little faith that a student would be able to navigate the process themselves after graduating.

At this point, Maryland expects families- families who have not been given the right to legally work in the state of Maryland- to have paid three years of taxes, and non-undocumented students' families to have paid one year of taxes to qualify for FAFSA. This is not equitable and causes the state of Maryland to limit opportunities for undocumented students. Data from 2023 (heavily skewed missing information from schools) and [2022](#) (more complete data) show that only about 7% of the 2,000+ undocumented students we graduate each year in Maryland make it to college in Maryland under the Dream Act. By these measures, the Dream Act is not working for most undocumented students.

This is an urgent matter this year as we face a workforce shortage in many fields. My current student data shows that almost half of my undocumented students are interested in working in the healthcare field, something Maryland desperately needs. Limiting access for these high achieving, hardworking students to pursue higher education not only hurts the students and their families, but also limits Maryland's workforce and economy at large. We deserve to have students like John become teachers. For these reasons, I ask for a **FAVORABLE REPORT** on SB637.

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