

Committee Testimony: HB 532

Good afternoon Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkens, and esteemed members of the committee. My name is Nate Tinbite, I'm a proud resident of Silver Spring, a college student, and the former Student Member of the Montgomery County Board of Education. I stand before you today in full support of Delegate Vogel's bill regarding the Driver's Education Assistance Grant Program.

In my tenure on the Board, I engaged with thousands of students across Montgomery County and the State. Among the myriad of concerns voiced by students, access to affordable Driver's Education courses stood out prominently.

Years have passed, yet the issue persists. Allow me to shed light on some crucial insights gleaned from my conversations with students:

Firstly, families bear a significant financial burden, often shelling out several hundred dollars to meet the state's driver's education program requirement. A study by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety has underscored troubling racial and economic disparities among teens obtaining their driver's licenses by age 18.

Moreover, costs, convenience, and competing academic priorities pose formidable barriers to teens aspiring to become licensed drivers. Offering driver's education at school sites could alleviate these challenges, providing a convenient option for students juggling academic and extracurricular demands. Notably, earning a driver's license opens doors to increased opportunities, including part-time employment and broader access to goods, services, and experiences.

On a personal note, I intimately understand the financial strain associated with driver's education courses. During high school, I grappled with the same challenge. To support my family and fund these courses, I worked early mornings before classes. If driver's education had been offered in my school, it would have lifted a tremendous burden, enabling me to focus on more pressing matters. Conversations with Maryland students echo this sentiment, underscoring the transformative impact of free or low-cost programs within high schools.

In short, I implore the committee to consider the profound impact of this bill. By ensuring equitable access to driver's education, we not only empower our youth but also foster a more inclusive and opportunity-rich society. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.