

January 17, 2025

The Honorable Delegate Ben Barnes
Appropriations Committee
House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Support for House Bill 207 – Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out-of-State Tuition Exemption Eligibility

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

Maryland Latinos Unidos (MLU) is a statewide advocate dedicated to unifying and empowering Latino and immigrant communities. Our mission is to address disparities, promote equity, and create opportunities for underrepresented Marylanders. In alignment with this mission, we express our strong support for House Bill 207, which seeks to amend the eligibility criteria for undocumented students to receive an out-of-state tuition exemption.

House Bill 207 proposes to reduce the required period for tax filings from three years to two years for individuals or their guardians to qualify for out-of-state tuition exemptions. This adjustment is crucial as it removes unnecessary barriers that hinder access to higher education for undocumented students, a demographic that significantly contributes to the cultural and economic fabric of our state.

The current three-year tax filing requirement delays educational opportunities for students eager to advance their academic pursuits. By shortening this period to two years, the bill facilitates a more inclusive and equitable pathway to higher education. This change is particularly impactful for Latino communities, who represent a substantial portion of Maryland's population yet face systemic obstacles in accessing affordable education.

From a fiscal perspective, while there may be concerns about the potential impact on state revenues, studies have shown that increasing access to higher education yields long-term economic benefits. Graduates contribute to the economy through higher earning potential and increased tax contributions. Therefore, the initial investment in providing tuition exemptions is offset by the economic advantages of a more educated workforce.

At MLU, we have observed firsthand the challenges that extended tax filing requirements impose on undocumented students. These barriers not only delay educational attainment but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit community advancement. By implementing the provisions of House Bill 207, Maryland can take a progressive step toward dismantling these obstacles and promoting educational equity.

This legislation aligns with MLU's core values of equity, empowerment, and justice. Enacting House Bill 207 will enhance access to higher education, fostering a more inclusive environment that benefits all Marylanders.

We commend Delegate Pasteur for sponsoring this important bill and urge the Appropriations Committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 207. MLU stands ready to collaborate with legislators, educational institutions, and community organizations to ensure the successful implementation of this policy.

Thank you for your consideration. Should you have any questions or require further discussion, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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