

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB268

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Date: January 17, 2025

Position: Favorable

To whom it may concern,

My name is Lauren DiFatta, and I am a school counselor at Owings Mills High School. I am writing to express my strong support for the House Bill SB268 Higher Education-Undocumented Students-Out of State Tuition Exemption Eligibility. This bill would reduce the requirement for Maryland financial aid applications from three years of parent tax returns to one year. This change would provide an essential opportunity for students like one of my seniors, David, to pursue their dreams and contribute to our state's future.

David (*name changed for privacy reasons*) came to the United States from Peru in 2023, driven by a desire for better opportunities and access to higher education. In Peru, access to college is highly competitive, and his family saw the U.S. as a place where David could thrive. Since arriving, David has proven himself to be an exceptional student with superior grades and remarkable artistic talent. In just one year in a U.S. school, he has achieved a 3.6 cumulative GPA and advanced rapidly in English, skipping ESOL levels due to his strong language proficiency.

This year, David has been accepted to two colleges so far: the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) and Towson University. His dream is to become a graphic designer, and he is thrilled to have been recognized for his hard work and potential. However, like many undocumented students, David faces significant financial barriers. While he has earned a merit scholarship from one school, it will not cover all his expenses, and he is deeply concerned about how he will afford college.

David has been working tirelessly since his arrival in the U.S., filing one year of tax returns. Under the current three-year requirement, he is ineligible for Maryland financial aid programs. If this bill is passed, David and students like him will have a real chance to pursue higher education and contribute their talents to our communities.

David's story is just one example of how this legislation could transform lives. By reducing the tax requirement to one year, the state can empower hardworking students who are ready to succeed but lack the financial resources to do so. These students are part of our community, and their success benefits us all. David's story is just one of many who deserve an opportunity to pursue their dreams and live up to their potential. This is why I am asking for a **FAVORABLE REPORT** on SB268.

Lauren DiFatta

School Counselor

Owings Mills High School

laurendifatta@gmail.com