



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 755 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal - Kinship Care Relationships

SB 755 seeks to ensure that students in informal kinship care relationships are classified as independent to qualify for student financial assistance under the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

By recognizing the unique and often challenging circumstances these students face, this bill creates a pathway for students to access the financial resources necessary to pursue higher education without the undue burden of providing parental financial information that is either unavailable or irrelevant. Informal kinship care is a necessary yet often overlooked arrangement for children who cannot live with their parents due to serious family hardships, including parental death, serious illness, addiction, incarceration, abandonment, or military deployment.

Currently, financial aid applications often require parental income information, which may be unavailable or irrelevant in kinship care situations, preventing these students from receiving the assistance they need. Students in informal kinship care circumstances may not be considered eligible for state financial aid programs until they endure a lengthy process referred to as a “dependency override.” Due to this daunting process, these student’s may not be able to provide the information, or the timing may be such that they may not know early enough they have resources to pay for college.

By adopting this bill, Maryland will ensure that students in informal kinship care have the same opportunities as their peers to pursue postsecondary education. Benefits of the legislation include:

- **Fair Financial Aid Access:** Ensuring students are evaluated based on their actual financial circumstances rather than presumed parental support.
- **Increased College Enrollment and Completion Rates:** Reducing financial barriers allows more students to achieve academic and career success.
- **Economic and Social Benefits:** Higher education leads to improved job opportunities and economic stability, benefiting individuals and communities.

Maryland has long championed policies that promote access to education for all students. By passing this bill, the state reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that every student—regardless of family circumstances—has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Therefore, I strongly urge a favourable report on SB0755.