

KIPP:Forward

February 18, 2025

To members of the Maryland Senate:

Today, I write to affirm, advocate for, and support SB 755 outlining changes to MHEC's processing of students in informal kinship care situations. I am the Lead Manager for Alumni Persistence at KIPP Baltimore, Baltimore City's largest public charter school. A key pillar of KIPP's mission is increasing our students' access to postsecondary career preparation programs to ensure that our community has full and equitable access to satisfying, upwardly-mobile careers and choice-filled lives. It is in my capacity as a trained social worker, counselor, instructor, mentor, and long-time member of the KIPP community that I offer my perspective and support for this critical bill.

I have worked in Maryland with college enrolled students for ten years. In that time, I have counseled and supported many students who lived with and were cared for by family other than their parents/guardians who did not have official temporary or full legal guardianship for the student. These students were often self-supporting and required significant financial aid support to attend college while living in safe conditions and taking care of their own basic needs. The current process to determine a student's independence requires that the financial aid office at their institution complete a "dependency override". This process is long and laborious and - as a result - renders a student ineligible to receive the Maryland Guaranteed Access Grant due to missing the MHEC FAFSA deadline. **This bill will allow these needy students vital access to the Guaranteed Access Grant, which I have observed to be a life-changing financial opportunity for young people who face financial hurdles to degree attainment.** These students are eligible in every other sense, and deserve this important opportunity. Therefore, creating this new pathway to determine independence removes a painful, unnecessary hurdle towards equitable college access and attainment.

I believe that allowing students to determine independence through MHEC will greatly improve the lives of this subset of students. I am grateful to Maryland legislators for their work and support of students' futures.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brianna Callahan, MSW



Lead Manager of Alumni Persistence
KIPP Baltimore