

Before the Senate Energy, Education and the Environment Committee
SB552 – High School Graduation Requirements – Financial Aid Application
SUPPORT

I've spent the last 16 years as an education advocate who has had the great fortune of working alongside hundreds of students, helping them to realize their tremendous power to create change, influence decisions, and use their skills and talents to pursue their passions to make the world a better place. My public education advocacy history is wide and deep – as a parent, local PTA leader, countywide and state PTA leader, high school teacher and Board of Education member.

Anything that helps a student pursue their future goals and ambitions– whatever that student looks like, wherever they come from, whatever their identity, whoever they love, however they arrived here, whatever advantages they have or don't – is a benefit to everyone. The diverse, talented, inclusive, multi-lingual workforce Maryland needs is in our classrooms right now.

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFA) are tools to help students realize their potential and pursue their talents and goals. Ensuring that every Maryland high school student completes at least one of these as part of their high school journey is a simple, straightforward, commonsense step to help students move into their post-K-12 futures with as many opportunities as possible. It's also smart for the State of Maryland – the more students empowered to efficiently and successfully prepare for their future careers means a sharp, skilled, critical-thinking future workforce.

Having worked inside K-12 education for many years, wearing many different hats – parent, advocate, teacher, policy-maker – I know good ideas aren't always adopted for a variety of reasons. But the vision of SB552 is not only good intention wrapped in common sense, but a strategy to accomplish the goal of having every graduating senior complete either the FAFSA or MSFA has already been developed and successfully implemented by Carlos Nalda, the college and career advisor at Seneca Valley High School in Montgomery County. Last year, in the midst of all of the delay, confusion and frustration surrounding the new FAFSA system rollout, Mr. Nalda worked with Seneca Valley's English department to set up a series of visits to senior

English classes, sharing information about FAFSA and MSFA and helping students begin and complete the online enrollment process in real time.

Even with all of the glitches experienced by students in the FAFSA enrollment process, Seneca Valley's FAFSA completion rate went up --- way up --- by far the highest completion rate in Montgomery County. Mr. Nalda's simple approach was shared as a best practice throughout MCPS, other high schools adopted his strategy and-- even as the enrollment deadline neared -- those schools were able to dramatically increase their FAFSA completion rates.

Adopting SB552, with the proven example of how to implement it effectively and efficiently, is a win-win -- for students, families, counties and the state. I urge you send this Bill to the full Senate. Thank you for your consideration,

Lynne Harris
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