

FAVORABLE
Senate Bill 552
Education— High School Graduation Requirements— Financial Aid
Application

Senate Committee on Education, Energy, and the Environment
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The Maryland State Education Association supports Senate Bill 552, which would require public high school students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA) as a graduation requirement beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. Included in this legislation is a provision allowing students and their families to opt out of this submission by submitting a form signaling their decision to decline participation.

MSEA represents 75,000 educators and school employees who work in Maryland's public schools, teaching and preparing our 896,837 students for careers and jobs of the future. MSEA also represents 39 local affiliates in every county across the state of Maryland, and our parent affiliate is the 3 million-member National Education Association (NEA).

According to the National College Attainment Network's FAFSA Tracker, FAFSA completion was down 11.6% in 2024 compared to the class of 2023.¹ Importantly, this bill offers the option to complete the MSFAA, which provides information about in-state tuition for undocumented students and families. Students who do not complete these forms may not realize what funding is available to pursue postsecondary education.

The most important jobs Maryland educators have is ensuring that every one of our students receives a world-class education, one that fully prepares them

¹ National College Attainment Network (2024). <https://www.ncan.org/news/685038/Freshman-Enrollment-Down-5-Following-FAFSA-Completion-Declines.htm#:~:text=NCAN's%20FAFSA%20Tracker%2C%20an%20interactive,to%20the%20class%20of%202023>.

for college, career, and life. We do this by identifying the strengths and potential in our students so that we can assist them in fully harnessing and developing those assets in the service of building a brighter future themselves and their communities. If college is their ultimate goal but affording college is an insurmountable challenge, we must do all that we can to assist our students in accessing all of the resources and supports available to them in order to make their goal a reality.

By requiring that every graduating senior complete either the FAFSA or the MSFAA, or actively choose to decline the opportunity to do so, we are enabling more students to gain access to a financial support that could move that which previously may have appeared to be out of reach closer to their grasp.

MSEA has held a longstanding position in opposition of legislatively mandated graduation requirements, believing that the determination of minimum graduation requirements falls within the purview of the Maryland State Board of Education with local boards of education empowered to establish any additional requirements for students within their districts. However, we stand in support of this effort as we believe that the end goal of increasing access and opportunity for an affordable college education is not only a sound policy decision for our state but is one of the most impactful ways in which educators can do our part to provide opportunity and access to college for all of our students regardless of their family's economic circumstances or their ability to afford higher education.

We urge the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 552.