

In Support of SB755  
February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2025

Good afternoon,

I am Deja Cobbs, the Director of Program Services at First Generation College Bound. I am here in support of SB 755-Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships.

First Generation College Bound is a non-profit organization in Prince George's County providing College Access services to low-income and first generation students for 35 years. First Generation College Bound provides comprehensive support to students so that they can enroll and graduate from college. Our organization works with students and their families to navigate the complicated processes of preparing and applying for college. A critical part of this process is applying for financial aid.

When we enroll students into our College Access Program, we are able to identify what their dependency status is. We are also able to identify what state need base scholarships and/or grants they may be eligible for after completing the FAFSA. Our outreach efforts go, to increase the knowledge of the financial aid process to low income students especially those in Kinship Care Relationships. Many students and caregivers do not understand the financial aid process. They are not aware that legal custody or temporary custody does not mean the same as legal guardianship. This becomes a shock to many when they are informed by their college to complete a Dependency Override Appeal.

The Dependency Override Appeal process can be long and can delay a student from successfully enrolling into college. It can delay a student from receiving on or off campus housing, enrollment in college courses as well as receiving federal and state financial aid. There are letters of support needed by specific parties and verification documents needed every year they are enrolled in college. These students cannot receive any type of financial aid until the appeal process is complete. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) can begin awarding students state grants and scholarships in late spring. However, a student that is required to complete this type of appeal is often just beginning the appeal process at the time of state financial aid awarding. Once the appeal is approved then they are asked by MHEC for the same verification documentation. This puts students who have informal Kinship Care Relationships at risk of not being awarded state financial aid. This is why FGCB is supporting this SB 755 to hopefully simplify the verification process so that a student in this situation can be awarded state financial aid in time for them to enroll in college.

As I close, First Generation College Bound wants to work collaboratively with the Maryland Higher Education Commission as we support students with Kinship Care relationships to receive state financial aid that will help them attend and graduate college.