



Maryland Higher Education Commission

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Senate Bill 552

Education - High School Graduation Requirements - Financial Aid Application

February 21, 2025

1:00 PM

Favorable

Good afternoon Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of Senate Bill 552. I am Elena Quiroz-Livanis, Deputy Secretary for the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC). Senator Malcolm Augustine, thank you for sponsoring this important piece of legislation increasing higher education access.

Each year, a significant amount of federal financial aid goes unclaimed due to students not completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Nationally, the high school class of 2023 left over \$4 billion in Pell Grants unclaimed by not completing the FAFSA. Similarly, the class of 2022 missed out on approximately \$3.6 billion in Pell Grants for the same reason.

These unclaimed funds represent substantial missed opportunities for students to receive financial support for their education. Completing the FAFSA is a crucial step in accessing available financial aid and ensuring that eligible students do not leave money on the table.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) completion is critically important in Maryland for several reasons, particularly in ensuring access to financial aid for students pursuing higher education. It is the first step for Maryland students to qualify for federal grants (like the Pell Grant), state scholarships, and institutional aid. Maryland offers several need-based and merit-based financial aid programs that require FAFSA completion, including:

- Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant – Provides up to full tuition and fees for low-income students
- Educational Assistance (EA) Grant – Need-based funding for Maryland students.
- Delegate and Senatorial Scholarships – State legislative scholarships that often require FAFSA completion to name a few.

MHEC supports this legislation because FAFSA completion increases college enrollment and success. Studies show that students who complete the FAFSA are more likely to continue on their educational journey with submitting an admission application and enrollment.

Currently, Maryland's FAFSA Completion Rate is 37.24% as of February 7th with 25,903 applications submitted. There are approximately 69,549 - 12th graders enrolled for 2024-2025. Also Maryland is ranked 13th nationally, however the other states have not fully implemented their FAFSA Completion graduation strategy.

In closing, I fully support Senate Bill 552 and ask the Committee for a favorable report. Maryland remains a national leader in higher education, completing the FAFSA and lowering barriers to educational access is critical to maintaining the state's standing. FAFSA completion is a financial aid tool that can be applied to build confidence and improve education outcomes for Maryland's most vulnerable students.