

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB268

Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out-of-State Tuition Exemption Eligibility

Committee: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Date: January 21, 2025

Position: Support

Good afternoon Senator Brooks and Delegates of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

My name is Emma O'Grady, and I am a school social worker with Baltimore City Public Schools. I work with newcomer immigrant and refugee students across the district, supporting their academic and social-emotional needs. These students embody resilience, kindness, empathy, and an unwavering dedication to achieving their goals. They have much to contribute to our communities and our state, but systemic barriers stand in their way.

Currently, students and their families must have filed taxes for three consecutive years prior to the student's high school graduation to qualify for in-state tuition and state financial aid. While I understand the intent behind requiring tax contributions for state programs, this standard unfairly disadvantages undocumented families. Unlike U.S. citizens, who can demonstrate intent to reside in Maryland for just 12 consecutive months to access the same benefits, undocumented students face a higher and inequitable threshold.

Many of these families face significant challenges that make meeting this requirement unattainable. Parents who are new to the country or children who could not work before the age of 16 have no way of meeting this rule, regardless of how much they want to contribute. This policy shuts the door on their future, rendering higher education financially out of reach and limiting their ability to fully participate in and contribute to Maryland's workforce and economy.

We should not hold these students to a higher standard. These inequities are harmful not only to them but to the future prosperity of our state. For these reasons, I urge a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB268 to ensure that all hardworking students have equitable access to the opportunities they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Emma O'Grady
School Social Worker
Baltimore City Public Schools