

SB 755_Adama Kone_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Adama Kone

Position: FAV

Senate Bill 755

Hello my name is Adama Kone and I am here in support of SB 755.

When I was five years old, my mother passed away, and I was placed in the custody of my biological uncle and his wife. I spent most of my childhood in Stafford, Virginia, living with my uncle's wife's parents. However, before the pandemic, during my eighth-grade year, we moved to Prince George's County, near College Park, and I began attending Greenbelt Middle School. I struggled with this transition, as it meant leaving my grandparents' home—the only life I had ever known.

The summer before ninth grade, I learned that my grandfather had filed for custody, seeking to remove me from my uncle and his wife's guardianship. This legal battle lasted through most of my high school years while I attended High Point High School. The summer before my junior year, the court ultimately denied my grandfather's request for custody but granted him visitation rights, reasoning that I was only a few years away from adulthood and independence. I accepted this ruling with a heavy heart and focused on making the best of my remaining years in high school.

During my senior year, I discovered FGCB through my girlfriend's connection with Mr. Melgar from the FGCB College Access program. FGCB became the most impactful part of my final year in high school. With the guidance of Mr. Fisher, Mr. Melgar, and Ms. Cobbs, I found the financial assistance I needed for college. Since FAFSA typically requires financial information from birth parents, my situation made it challenging to navigate the financial aid process. With their support, I realized my potential and felt empowered to pursue my dreams.

I was especially inspired to choose the University of Maryland, one of the nation's top research institutions. In February, I was thrilled to receive my admission decision, though I was accepted under conditional acceptance. I was placed in the Academic Achievement Program (AAP), designed for low-income, first-generation students to help them succeed despite the university's rigorous curriculum. As part of this program, I was required to complete the Summer Transitional Program (STP), a six-week session of university-accredited classes that would determine my full admission. While this program came with a cost, it was fully covered by financial aid as a FAFSA recipient.

During my third week in STP, I was informed by the university that I needed to provide independent status verification to have my Pell Grant and GA Grant funds released. I immediately reached out to FGCB, and they helped me gather the necessary documentation for submission. However, I waited nearly a month for a response, only to learn that my uncle's proof of guardianship from the court was not sufficient to prove my independent status. As a result, the university was unable to disburse my funds, and my bill began accumulating interest for nearly three months due to charges from STP and my fall semester enrollment.

Once again, I turned to Mr. Melgar for guidance, and he assisted me in filing an unusual circumstance appeal required by the university. This process involved gathering letters and testimonies to support my case. I also sought help from Dr. Lewis, the director of AAP, who became aware of my situation and

contacted his liaison within the financial aid department. Meanwhile, FGCB also reached out to their contacts within the university.

After months of back-and-forth communication and uncertainty, my funds were finally released. However, I then had to request that the university retroactively remove the interest charges that had accumulated on my bill. This entire ordeal was the most stressful part of my college experience, as I constantly feared losing my GA Grant and Pell Grant. I also worried about whether I would have the financial means to continue attending in the spring semester, as my charges remained unpaid. This is why I am in support of this bill so that students like me will not have to fear the loss of financial aid like the GA grant.

Testimony in Support of SB 755.pdf

Uploaded by: Alonzo Washington

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB 755 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal - Kinship Care Relationships

SB 755 seeks to ensure that students in informal kinship care relationships are classified as independent to qualify for student financial assistance under the Maryland Higher Education Commission.

By recognizing the unique and often challenging circumstances these students face, this bill creates a pathway for students to access the financial resources necessary to pursue higher education without the undue burden of providing parental financial information that is either unavailable or irrelevant. Informal kinship care is a necessary yet often overlooked arrangement for children who cannot live with their parents due to serious family hardships, including parental death, serious illness, addiction, incarceration, abandonment, or military deployment.

Currently, financial aid applications often require parental income information, which may be unavailable or irrelevant in kinship care situations, preventing these students from receiving the assistance they need. Students in informal kinship care circumstances may not be considered eligible for state financial aid programs until they endure a lengthy process referred to as a “dependency override.” Due to this daunting process, these student’s may not be able to provide the information, or the timing may be such that they may not know early enough they have resources to pay for college.

By adopting this bill, Maryland will ensure that students in informal kinship care have the same opportunities as their peers to pursue postsecondary education. Benefits of the legislation include:

- **Fair Financial Aid Access:** Ensuring students are evaluated based on their actual financial circumstances rather than presumed parental support.
- **Increased College Enrollment and Completion Rates:** Reducing financial barriers allows more students to achieve academic and career success.
- **Economic and Social Benefits:** Higher education leads to improved job opportunities and economic stability, benefiting individuals and communities.

Maryland has long championed policies that promote access to education for all students. By passing this bill, the state reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that every student—regardless of family circumstances—has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Therefore, I strongly urge a favourable report on SB0755.

SB 755 Letter of Support Final.pdf

Uploaded by: Brianna Callahan

Position: FAV

KIPP:Forward

February 18, 2025

To members of the Maryland Senate:

Today, I write to affirm, advocate for, and support SB 755 outlining changes to MHEC's processing of students in informal kinship care situations. I am the Lead Manager for Alumni Persistence at KIPP Baltimore, Baltimore City's largest public charter school. A key pillar of KIPP's mission is increasing our students' access to postsecondary career preparation programs to ensure that our community has full and equitable access to satisfying, upwardly-mobile careers and choice-filled lives. It is in my capacity as a trained social worker, counselor, instructor, mentor, and long-time member of the KIPP community that I offer my perspective and support for this critical bill.

I have worked in Maryland with college enrolled students for ten years. In that time, I have counseled and supported many students who lived with and were cared for by family other than their parents/guardians who did not have official temporary or full legal guardianship for the student. These students were often self-supporting and required significant financial aid support to attend college while living in safe conditions and taking care of their own basic needs. The current process to determine a student's independence requires that the financial aid office at their institution complete a "dependency override". This process is long and laborious and - as a result - renders a student ineligible to receive the Maryland Guaranteed Access Grant due to missing the MHEC FAFSA deadline. **This bill will allow these needy students vital access to the Guaranteed Access Grant, which I have observed to be a life-changing financial opportunity for young people who face financial hurdles to degree attainment.** These students are eligible in every other sense, and deserve this important opportunity. Therefore, creating this new pathway to determine independence removes a painful, unnecessary hurdle towards equitable college access and attainment.

I believe that allowing students to determine independence through MHEC will greatly improve the lives of this subset of students. I am grateful to Maryland legislators for their work and support of students' futures.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Brianna Callahan, MSW



Lead Manager of Alumni Persistence
KIPP Baltimore

SB 755_ Deja Cobbs _FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Deja Cobbs

Position: FAV

In Support of SB755
February 21st, 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.

SB0755_MACC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Drew Jabin

Position: FAV

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

February 21, 2025

**SB 755 - Higher Education - Student Financial Assistance - Students in Informal Kinship
Care Relationships**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), representing Maryland's 16 community colleges, strongly supports **SB 755**, which expands access to financial assistance for students in informal kinship care relationships. As open-enrollment institutions, Maryland's community colleges are committed to ensuring that higher education remains accessible to all students, regardless of their personal or financial circumstances.

For many students, financial barriers are the single greatest obstacle to pursuing a college degree. Students in informal kinship care relationships—those raised by relatives or other caregivers without formal legal guardianship—often face unique financial hardships. Because they do not always meet the standard definition of an independent student, they may be excluded from financial aid eligibility that could otherwise help them afford college. SB 755 corrects this gap by ensuring that these students are recognized as independent for state financial aid purposes, making higher education more attainable for them.

SB 755 directly supports college affordability, degree completion, and workforce development by expanding access to financial assistance. When more students can afford college, more Marylanders will gain the skills and credentials needed for high-demand careers, strengthening the state's workforce and economy. This bill aligns with Maryland's broader goals of increasing college attainment rates and removing barriers that prevent students from reaching their full potential.

Accordingly, MACC urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** vote on **SB 755**.

Please contact Brad Phillips (bphillips@mdacc.org) or Drew Jabin (djabin@mdacc.org) with questions.

MD Catholic Conference_SB 755_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Garrett O'Day

Position: FAV



February 21, 2025

SB 755

Higher Education - Student Financial Assistance - Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships

Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of Senate Bill 755. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government. Additionally, we offer this testimony on behalf of the families of more than 50,000 students served by over 150 PreK-12 Catholic schools in Maryland.

Senate Bill 755 ensures that individuals who are under informal kinship care are considered financially independent for the purpose of qualifying for student financial assistance in applying for the Guaranteed Access Grant Program. The Guaranteed Access Grant Program is a need-based grant program providing financial assistance for educational expenses to students enrolled at postsecondary institutions. Both public and nonpublic school students are eligible to participate in the Guaranteed Access Grant Program, so long as they meet the requirements.

The Catholic Conference supports wholeheartedly any effort to assist low-income students, who are often among the most marginalized in terms of access to quality education. Our state should do all that it can to promote successful educational outcomes for children who might otherwise be deprived of the same opportunities as wealthier children. Access to a higher education leads to gainful employment, thus breaking the cycle of poverty plaguing many low-income communities. Pope Francis has stated that the Church should highly value education, leading to gainful employment, as it is through the same that "human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 192).

States should do all that they can to level the playing fields across income levels regarding access to education. It is in the best interest for the future of our state to ensure that low-income students can break the cycle of poverty and have access to the endless possibilities that a quality education can provide, especially for those with limited financial means. Therefore, we urge this Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 755.

SB 755_Kelly Atabong_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kelly Atabong

Position: FAV

**House of Senate
In Support of SB 755**

Hello, my name is Kelly Atabong, and I'm here to support SB 755. In 2015 my mother became ill and could not take care of me. She was left in my home country of Cameroon. Ever since then I have been in the care of my biological aunt. During my senior year of high school, I had no idea if I would even get into college or how the process worked. The most challenging part was dealing with the dependency override appeal, due to my aunt not having a legal guardianship. First Generation College Bound was there for me, guiding my aunt and ensuring all the paperwork was properly handled so that I could start school on time.

I was introduced to Ms. Deja, who has been incredible throughout this entire college bound journey. She went above and beyond to help me every step of the way. In the spring of my senior year I was accepted into Bowie State University. I was excited however, it was overwhelming, especially since I was living with my aunt, who didn't have legal custody of me. This made the process even longer and more complicated. However, with FGCB's support, everything became much more manageable. They made sure I had all the necessary documents for school, helped clarify any confusion, and kept me on track.

Thanks to FGCB, I was also told about the Guaranteed Access Grant, which significantly helped with my academic expenses. However before I could see if I was eligible for the GA grant I had to see if my Dependency Override Appeal was approved by Bowie State University. After it was approved then I had to complete the same verification with MHEC. I also had to complete these appeals each school year. During my junior year in 2022 I almost lost my GA grant due to needing to complete the same verification again however I did not know I would need to do it every year. If FGCB was not there to help advocate for me with my college's financial aid and MHEC I would have never received the financial aid I was eligible for. My hope is that this appeal process for students in my situation to receive the GA grant would be simplified.

FGCB has had a profound impact on my life, and I am forever grateful. With their support, I was able to graduate from Bowie State University debt-free. My life changed forever in 2024 when I was offered admission to the University of Notre Dame to pursue my dream of becoming a Physician Assistant. I'm deeply thankful for the organization that believes in seeing future leaders succeed, and I hope many other students in similar situations as mine will be able to do the same.

SB 755_Orethea Mattison_FAV (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Orethea Mattison

Position: FAV

From the Desk of
Orethea Y. Mattison
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February 18, 2025

Honorable Alonzo Washington
100 State Cir.,
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB 755

Dear Senator Washington, my mother Mardee Mattison has custody of her grandson Keone' A. Mattison and her great-grandchildren Savanah Quinlan-Cure, Maurice D. Cure, and Asia M. Cure. She had custody of Keone since 2007 because his mother gave him to her with a notarized letter. The letter stated that she was unable to care for him because of her mental health issues. My brother Brian Keone's father, was in/out of prison during Keone' early childhood and died June 9, 2016.

My mother had custody of Savanah and her siblings since April 17, 2015, because of her mother's drug use and my nephew Skyler Cure surrender his custody rights, and the Department of Social Services placed them in my mother's custody.

Prior to the Pandemic in 2019 Keone' was an average student and during the pandemic he struggled with virtual learning and abandonment issues. When schools reopened, he had to attend summer school for promotion to High School. Once in high school, he became interested in sports and realized he had to maintain his grades. Since he started playing football and running track his grades improved and for the first time during his academic journey, he reached the honor roll at the end of his junior year and continued thus far. He is current taking an AP English class for the first. Keone' has received acceptance letters from six colleges/universities throughout the U.S. including University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

Savanah has been an honor student since elementary school. Academics are no challenge for Savanah, she has taken AP classes in addition to being the Co-captain of her cheerleader squad in sophomore and junior years. In her senior year Savanah

enrolled in Anne Arundel Community College for Statistic and obtain a B grade while taking her senior year courses. She continues to stride academically and maintain a GPA above 3.5. Savannah has received acceptance letters from eight colleges/universities throughout the U.S. including Towson University.

Keone' and Savannah are excited about wanting to attend college and have a successful career. For them to attend college they need financial assistance because my mother is retired and cannot afford to send them to college. Going to college would be an opportunity for them to achieve their dreams and become productive members of society, as well as obtain what their parents did not.

Respectfully submitted,

Orethea Y. Mattison

Orethea Y. Mattison

SB755_MARFY_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Therese Hessler

Position: FAV



February 21, 2025

Senate Bill 755 - Higher Education - Student Financial Assistance - Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY) writes in support of *Senate bill 755 – Higher Education - Student Financial Assistance - Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships*. We are an association of private child caring organizations providing foster care, group homes, and other services through more than 200 programs across Maryland. MARFY aims to support Maryland's most vulnerable children who are in out of home placements due to abuse, neglect or severe mental health, and medical needs. We operate group homes, foster care programs, and independent living programs, for children under a wide variety of living and legal guardian arrangements.

MARFY strongly supports Senate Bill 755, which seeks to consider children under 'informal kinship relationships' as legally independent, for college financial aid qualification purposes. This bill addresses a lack of inclusion of children who fall under this guardianship category to receive the college education they deserve, where children under foster care placements are currently classified as independent and are therefore eligible for these grants.

Maryland's children living with a non-parental family member as an 'Informal Kinship Relationship' are currently ineligible for various scholarships including the Guaranteed Access Grant state-funded child care grant, which creates two primary issues:

1. **Disparity in Students Able to Attend College:** Many Informal Kinship guardians are unable to provide financial support to send a student to college, due to an often unexpected and unplanned commitment. Students in these relationships are still not considered legally 'looked after' children, and the family members are not guaranteed financial assistance to help support the child during adolescence. The guardian may also decline to use household income towards the child's education, and the child therefore may not receive financial assistance for college even if the household earns enough income to not require financial aid. This means that without assistance, the child has a disproportionately lower chance of being able to attend college.
2. **Threatens the Student's ability to be Further Supported:** Financial assistance is not typically given to informal kinship guardians, and these guardians have a higher likelihood of struggling to juggle employment and childcare. If a child is unable to attend college after adolescence, the family member must financially care for the child for a longer period of time, giving way to more potential for inadequate care. Providing access



Maryland Association of
Resources for Families & Youth

to financial assistance to these students would help alleviate this stressor and prioritize the child's quality of care. It would also help students gain high-earning degrees and enter the workforce, potentially reducing adolescent poverty rates.

Expanding the qualifications for a student to be classified as independent would:

- **Ensure equity in higher education access** by helping children in unique living arrangements receive financial aid
- **Improve students' ability to qualify for the Guaranteed Access Grant Program** by classifying them as independent
- **Reduce unnecessary strain on kinship relationships** by helping students become independent members of society, and earn a high-earning degree
- **Reduce adolescent poverty** by helping independent students earn high paying jobs and financial independence
- **Help students qualify for other scholarships** by changing their status as independent according to state financial aid purposes.

This bill may increase State general fund expenditures if the eligibility addition causes an increase in the number of grants awarded. This will allow a greater number of students within foster care and home placement programs to receive financial assistance and be able to attend college. Estimates suggest that funding requirements for the Guaranteed Access Program would only require \$11,000 additional per student awarded, whereas the grant program as of 2025 has already spent over \$100 million for these grants.

In conclusion, Senate Bill 755 represents a critical step toward improving Maryland's higher education grant programs by ensuring that students under Informal Kinship Relationships may qualify for Guaranteed Access Grants. This inclusion will diminish inequity in which students in home placement systems are able to attend college and become financially independent and successful adults.

On behalf of MARFY and the children and families we serve, we respectfully ask the members of this committee to vote in favor of Senate Bill 755.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

For more information call or email:

Therese M. Hessler | 301-503-2576 | therese@ashlargr.com

SB0775 CPMC FAVA.pdf

Uploaded by: Diana Philip

Position: FWA

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



SB0755 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 21, 2025

Position: SUPPORT w/AMENDMENTS

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1996 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to promote meaningful child welfare reform. CPMC urges a favorable report with amendments on SB0755- Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships.¹

SB0770 intends to extend financial assistance for higher education to youth in informal kinship care. However, we have concerns regarding the language used to define eligible students. To ensure the bill includes the appropriate population, we are recommending amendments.

DEFINING INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE: According to **Education Article 7-101**, “informal kinship care” refers to a living arrangement in which a **relative of a child**, who is **not under the care, custody, or guardianship of the local department of social services**, provides for the child due to a **serious family hardship**, which includes:

1. **Death** of a parent or legal guardian
2. **Serious illness** of a parent or legal guardian
3. **Substance abuse** by a parent or legal guardian
4. **Incarceration** of a parent or legal guardian
5. **Abandonment** by a parent or legal guardian
6. **Active military duty** of a parent or legal guardian

With an **affidavit of family hardship**, informal caregivers can enroll the child in their local school district rather than the district where the child's parents reside.

CONCERNS WITH SB755'S LANGUAGE: SB0755 currently states that an individual is eligible for a Guaranteed Access Grant if they: “Participate in an informal kinship care relationship licensed by the Department of Human Services.”

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include Catholic Charities of Baltimore, Center for Hope, Child Justice, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (MD CASA), Court Appointed Special Advocates (Baltimore County), MD Chapter - American Academy of Pediatrics, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Children's Alliance, Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, and National Association of Social Workers – MD.

However, **the Department of Human Services does not license informal kinship care homes**. These are family-based arrangements made **without** state intervention, meaning this requirement is inaccurate and could exclude the intended population.

Additionally, under Education Article 7-101, a “relative” is defined as an **adult related by blood or marriage within the fifth degree of consanguinity**. However, SB0755 should also recognize **"kin of the heart"** - adults with a **close, familial bond** to the child, even if not related by blood or marriage.

By contrast, **formal kinship care** applies to children in the custody of the state and placed with relatives or “kin of the heart.” These children already qualify for higher education tuition waivers under foster care policies.

RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS: To ensure SB0755 serves the intended population, we recommend that the bill be amended as follows:

13 (2) AN INDIVIDUAL UNDER PARAGRAPH (1) OF THIS SUBSECTION IS
14 ELIGIBLE FOR A GUARANTEED ACCESS GRANT IF THE INDIVIDUAL:
15 (I) PARTICIPATES IN AN INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE **LIVING**
ARRANGEMENT
 ~~RELATIONSHIP LICENSED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN~~
~~SERVICES; AND~~
17 (II) PROVIDES A COPY OF THE AFFIDAVIT OF **FAMILY**
HARDSHIP SUBMITTED TO
18 THE COUNTY BOARD OF **EDUCATION** VERIFYING THE INFORMAL
KINSHIP CARE RELATIONSHIP
19 **THE INFORMAL KINSHIP CARE MAY BE PROVIDED BY AN ADULT**
RELATED TO THE CHILD BY BLOOD OR MARRIAGE WITHIN THE FIFTH
DEGREE OF CONSANGUINITY OR AN ADULT WITH WHOM THE CHILD HAS A
CLOSE FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIP

Youth in informal kinship care **do not** have access to the same resources as children in **Out-of-Home Placement**, despite often facing the same hardships. Their eligibility for college financial assistance should not be determined by the income of the caregivers who stepped up to support them without requiring government intervention. With the proposed amendments, SB755 will ensure that children in informal kinship care have access to financial assistance needed to pursue higher education.

It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland’s Children **urges a favorable report** with our recommended amendments on SB0770 - Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance – Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships.

SB 755

Uploaded by: Joseph Fisher

Position: FWA



February 21, 2025

Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee.

My name is Joseph Fisher. I am the Founder and CEO of First Generation College Bound. I also serve as the Chair of the Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity. The Maryland Alliance is a coalition of non-profit organizations throughout Maryland that assist students from low-income-first generation and marginalized families pursuing higher education.

I am pleased to testify on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity to support of **SB755 Higher Education – Student Financial Assistance - Students in Informal Kinship Care Relationships**. The purpose of this bill is for the Maryland Higher Education Commission to consider students who are in informal kinship care relationships eligible for Maryland State Financial Aid.

I am not only testifying for the Maryland Alliance on this legislation, but it is also personal for me. My experience with Kinship Care personally contributed to me creating First Generation College Bound in 1990. This is when I learned from Janice Doyle, the former retired Director of Financial Aid at the Maryland Higher Education Commission that students from low-income families, especially independent students, who were eligible for the Guaranteed Access, were not applying for financial aid. Gaining this information reinforced and supported my vision and mission not just for FGCB but for me as well. This is due to my wife Pat and I providing Kinship Care to my niece and nephews. Providing Kinship Care was due to their parents extenuating circumstances not being able to care for them. Rather than placing them in Foster Care, we accepted the responsibility to raise them. This was not our life as planned, but it happened. As a result of my MHEC Financial Aid knowledge, they were able to attend an affordable college and graduate. While having challenges and success, providing Kinship Care to our niece and nephews worked as they are experiencing a quality of life today.

The Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity is a coalition of nonprofit organizations providing student assistance to 85,000 families throughout every county in the state of Maryland.

Advocates for Children and Youth
CASA de Maryland
College Tracks, Inc.
CollegeBound Foundation
Community Youth Advance, Inc.
End Time Harvest Ministries
FAME – Foundation for the Advancement of Music & Education

First Generation College Bound, Inc.
Hillside Family of Agencies
It takes a Village to Help Our Children, Inc.
Joes Movement
KIPP Baltimore
Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, Inc.
MERIT Health Leadership Academy
YMCA of Central Maryland



However, during my years leading FGCB to provide college bound support to low-income families to attend college and graduate, we have students in Kinship care, many with grandparents not aware they are eligible for financial aid, and the Guaranteed Access Grant to attend college. It is important to note many individuals, especially grandparents prefer to raise their grandchildren rather than place them in foster care, providing them a more stable environment. However, due to many not having Kinship documents from the Department of Social Services, school system and guardian, MHEC is unable to approve them as an independent student for the Guaranteed Access Grant. The student is required to have the college they have been accepted to review documents for a dependency override. However, once the student is approved, which is usually late, especially for the Guaranteed Access Grant, they miss important commitment deadlines. The students also have to apply for the dependence override annually causing student frustration as many college financial aid offices are overwhelmed delaying the process. Due to these challenges, the Maryland Alliance is requesting that Kinship documentation from the School System and Department of Social Services confirms the Kinship Care arrangement and independent status for the MHEC Office of Financial Aid to approve and award a Guaranteed Access Grant. Approval will be of great benefit to the those providing Kinship Care of the student, not to be in foster care.

On the behalf of Maryland Alliance and those providing Kinship Care, especially grandparents, we support SB 755 for the students to be approved for the Guaranteed Access Grant, providing the approved documents stated.

Joseph Fisher

Chair

Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity.

The Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity is a coalition of nonprofit organizations providing student assistance to 85,000 families throughout every county in the state of Maryland.

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First Generation College Bound, Inc.
Hillside Family of Agencies
It takes a Village to Help Our Children, Inc.
Joes Movement
KIPP Baltimore
Maryland Business Roundtable for Education, Inc.
MERIT Health Leadership Academy
YMCA of Central Maryland