

**FAVORABLE**  
**House Bill 688**  
**Education— High School Graduation Requirements— Financial Aid**  
**Application**

**House Ways and Means Committee**  
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**Lauren Lamb**  
**Government Relations**

The Maryland State Education Association supports House Bill 688, 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.<sup>1</sup> Yet states that have recently instituted mandatory FAFSA requirements have shown increased completion rates of up to 23%, with the most significant increases in completion rates among students living in concentrations of poverty.<sup>2</sup> Importantly, this bill also offers the option to complete the MSFAA, which provides information about in-state tuition for undocumented

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> Mandatory FAFSA Policies Have Had Immediate Impact. The Century Foundation (2025). <https://tcf.org/content/report/mandatory-fafsa-policies-have-had-immediate-impact/>

students and families. Students who do not complete these forms may not realize what funding is available to them to pursue postsecondary education.

MSEA has had longstanding concerns about legislatively mandated graduation requirements, as that duty lies with the Maryland State Board of Education and local boards of education. We appreciate the provisions in this bill that consider circumstances such as non-completion or opt outs, and the sponsors' commitment to implementation with minimal impact on staff workloads. Recent trends in state policy and FAFSA completion rates make clear that this is a timely update, and its projected impact is aligned with the vision of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

College may not be the path for every student, but it should not be ruled out before students and their families have the full picture of the aid available to them. To ensure that every student can make a fully informed decision about their future after graduation, **we urge the committee to issue a favorable report on House Bill 688.**