

TO: House Committee on Ways and Means

BILL: House Bill 0688 – *Education – High School Graduation Requirements – Financial Aid Application*

DATE: February 25, 2025

POSITION: Support with Amendments

The Maryland State Department of Education and the State Board of Education provides the following information on **House Bill 0688– *Education – High School Graduation Requirements – Financial Aid Application***.

HB0688 Summary

HB0688 would require MSDE to make completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or completion of the Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA) a graduation requirement beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. MSDE would also be required to promulgate regulations for the requirements and the exceptions included in HB0688. Additionally, MSDE would be required to include in the regulations the guidelines to ensure that students have adequate support in completing the FAFSA. Additionally, this requirement will affect the operations of the MSDE data collection system to include verification of the completed FAFSAs and verification of the opt-out options.

MSDE Information

To complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), a student needs:

- Social Security Number
- Alien Registration Number (if not a U.S. citizen)
- Federal income tax returns, W-2s, and other records of money earned
- Bank statements and records of investments (if applicable)
- Records of untaxed income (if applicable)
- A Federal Student Aid (FSA) Identification (ID) to sign in electronically.

A student who is a dependent will need this information for his or her parents as well. The FAFSA is filed electronically, so access to a computer and the internet is required. In addition, given FAFSA requires this personally identifiable information, it will be pertinent that schools follow all of their data privacy processes to keep student and parent information safe.

High school counselors work with students and parents to help them complete the FAFSA through parent nights and evening sessions with parents and students. In most LEAs, school counselors invite representatives from higher education to present these workshops since they are experts in financial

aid. School counselors share information on free FAFSA sessions with all students and advertise FAFSA deadlines and on media sites.

Amendments

MSDE proposes that FAFSA completion be a requirement for high school students, but not a graduation requirement. This would be the only graduation requirement in statute. Determining high school graduation falls firmly within the authority of the State Board, and the Board would only consider amending the requirements after lengthy engagement with educators, counselors, superintendents, families, and students. We would not want to see a student barred from receiving their diploma for this one reason exclusively.

MSDE also recommends an amendment to stipulate that information about the requirement be readily available in multiple languages; and all materials related to requesting a waiver (proposed Section 7-205.1 (m)(3)), also are readily available in multiple languages.

MSDE respectfully requests consideration of these comments as HB0688 is discussed and deliberated.

For further information, please contact Dr. Akilah Alleyne (Executive Director of Government Affairs) at 410-767-0504, or Akilah.alleyne@maryland.gov.