



HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

House Bill 688

Education - High School Graduation Requirements - Financial Aid Application

February 25, 2025

Favorable

Chair Atterbeary, Vice Chair Wilkins and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on House Bill 688, which calls for Maryland high school students to complete a FAFSA or the State's application for financial assistance, or receive a waiver, to graduate.

The University System of Maryland (USM) is composed of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the state. Each of USM's 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from Western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

The USM, like our legislators, believe college affordability is critically important. In FY 2024, 80% of USM students were Maryland residents, and the USM awarded over \$100 million in need-based institutional aid to these students. This aid was in addition to State need-based aid students may have received. Students may also have received merit aid that includes a preference for student financial need. The key to identifying who is eligible for need-based aid is a student's FAFSA or, for those who cannot complete a FAFSA, the MHEC OneApp, which now has the State financial aid application. Every year, USM institutions conduct extensive outreach to ensure the applicants complete one of these two applications, and over the past year, those efforts were dramatically ramped up to offset FAFSA problems. Lessons learned will continue to be applied to maximize the number of applicants. But high schools provide a powerful site for helping students understand the role of these applications and how to access them.

Requiring students to apply for financial assistance can expedite and potentially facilitate families' financial planning for postsecondary education, especially for those who may not have otherwise had exposure to the application. With knowledge of aid that may be available, it is possible that more students would become interested in education after high school. In school environments that feel safe to students, students may also speak with counselors or other trusted adults about their fears of completing such an application, which can help them make an informed decision. The current environment for families who have members lacking a Social Security Number means that there are students who will not want to share personal data. Details of the waiver process will have to be carefully discussed to ensure there is not undue difficulty for families.

Thank you for accepting the USM remarks on this bill.



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