



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Gloria Brown Burnett, Interim Secretary

March 3, 2026

The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair
House Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: TESTIMONY ON HB 818 - HIGHER EDUCATION - FOSTER CARE RECIPIENTS AND HOMELESS YOUTH - TUITION EXEMPTION AND ASSOCIATED BENEFITS - POSITION: INFORMATION

Dear Chair Barnes and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

The Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) thanks the Committee for its consideration and respectfully submits information on House Bill 818 (HB 818).

With offices in every one of Maryland's jurisdictions, DHS provides preventive and supportive services, economic assistance, and meaningful connections to employment development and career opportunities to help Marylanders reach their full potential. Our Social Services Administration implements the Out-of-Home Care (OOH) program, which is affected by HB 818. HB 818 would require public institutions of higher education to provide free of charge room and board, required books, course materials, supplies, and equipment to foster care recipients who are exempt from paying tuition costs. Moreover, foster care recipients would be allowed to further utilize scholarships or grants by applying them to all or part of the cost of room and board, required books, course materials, supplies, and equipment. HB 818 would provide much-needed support for college-bound youth in foster care, ensuring that financial barriers do not obstruct their ability to pursue a higher education.

One of the pillars of the Moore-Miller Administration is ending childhood poverty. Childhood poverty is cyclical in nature and can only be broken at a systemic level by expanding economic mobility for individuals from lower socioeconomic means. HB 818 would improve upon an effective tuition waiver in [Education Article § 15-106.1](#). For youth aging out of care, waiving tuition costs at Maryland public institutions is helpful, but housing and other associated costs are significant barriers that keep many youth who experience foster care from completing higher education; and therefore, from reaching their personal and professional potential economically and intellectually.

Data collected from the Maryland National Youth-in-Transition Database (NYTD) in 2024 demonstrate that among youth aged 21 still in out-of-home care, 31% reported being enrolled in school and 4.8% reported being homeless. Whereas the youth aged 21 who were discharged from care, 12.5% reported being enrolled in school, and 37.5% reported being homeless. This data demonstrates that once youth exit care, they face significant difficulties maintaining school enrollment and ensuring housing stability. Many youth face the choice between completing their degree and working to fund their housing and personal expenses.

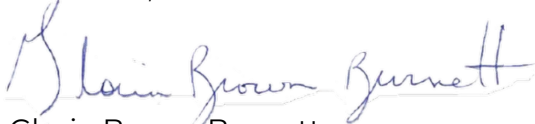
[Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center](#)'s (MLDSC) Dashboard on Foster Care and Higher Education Participation underscores the urgency of this intervention. Between 2011 and 2021, foster youth eligible for tuition waivers graduated by age 25 at a rate 73% higher than their foster care peers without waivers (12% vs. 19%), illustrating the difference in outcomes over a decade due solely to the financial barriers of higher education. Even foster care recipients eligible for tuition waivers complete degrees at less than half the rate of the general population (19% vs. 49%).

While attaining higher education attendance and completion is especially challenging for youth in foster care, HB 818 takes steps to ensure that economic limitations are not a reason for disparity in outcomes. HB 818 takes a decisive step toward closing the achievement gap, ensuring that a student's economic predisposition, a factor entirely beyond their control, never dictates their intellectual or professional potential.

Given the significant uncertainty in federal policy and the escalating fiscal shortfalls forecasted through Fiscal Year 2028, DHS urges caution against legislation that increases expenditures or diverts revenue without sustainable funding offsets. In light of the current fiscal crisis, the state must remain disciplined and strategic in its funding decisions to protect essential services for all Marylanders.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this information to the Committee for consideration during your deliberations. If you require additional information, please contact Justin Hayes, Acting Director of Government Affairs, at justin.hayes1@maryland.gov.

In service,



Gloria Brown Burnett
Interim Secretary