

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB1530**  
**Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out-of-State Tuition**  
**Exemption**

Eligibility Committee: Appropriations

Date: March 11, 2026

Position: Support

Good afternoon Chair Barnes and Honorable Members of the Committee, My name is Elena Walsh. I am the college counselor at the Academy for College and Career Exploration and I am here to offer my strong support for House Bill 1530 and the increased access to out-of-state tuition exemption eligibility for undocumented students. I work in Baltimore City Schools, and I am here on behalf of every single one of my students over the past 16 years that tried to chase the American Dream and was met with unnecessary bureaucracy.

Take Luis, the valedictorian who witnessed the murders of both of his parents in his home country. Who went from knowing no English to earning 4s and 5s on AP exams in just three and a half years in this country. He has the most incredible mind of any student I have ever worked with, and he had dreams of becoming an environmental engineer. Instead of changing the world, he is working at a gas station as he waits for asylum approval. He could not file three years of taxes because he did not work the first two years he lived here, so there were no taxes to file. Take Esteban, whose mother could not afford to pay the accountant's fee for three years, only one, and he missed registration. He works in a factory now, when he had plans to earn a degree in computer science. Finally, take Selena, who moved here from California. Selena moved here ahead of her mother to live with her aunt so there would be no disruption to her high school career. Her mother followed two years later when she had finally earned the money to pay for a cross-country move. Although Selena lived in Maryland for four years, her mother was only here for two. Although her mother paid taxes those two years, Selena missed the opportunity for in-state tuition and all state aid. She works for a catering company now when she would have finished up her nursing degree last May. A degree that would really come in handy with the nursing shortage that we are facing in our state.

Currently, the only viable post-secondary choices for undocumented students are to work at low-paying jobs or to go to college, as trade programs, the Governor's service year, and the military are not options. College is the obvious choice, however, many of students are unable to pursue a degree because of the current requirements of the Dream Act. Without three years of taxes, students are left with next to no options as any college will be cost prohibitive. It is honestly incomprehensible to me that we dangle this amazing opportunity in front of hardworking students and then make it so difficult to access.

I understand the reasoning behind having families pay taxes to benefit from in-state tuition rates, however, for citizens to qualify for the exact same benefits, they are only required to demonstrate that “for at least 12 consecutive months immediately prior to course registration that they had the continuous intent to reside in Maryland indefinitely and for a primary purpose other than that of attending an educational institution in Maryland.” Why are we holding undocumented students to a higher standard? This is inequitable and unreasonable, especially at a time when federal government overreach is so out of control that it is nerve-wracking to ask undocumented students for any additional paperwork. We are limiting opportunities for these students and for Maryland’s workforce. It is for these many reasons that I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on HB1530.