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Written Testimony in Support of HB1530

To: Chair Ben Barnes, Vice Chair Anne R. Kaiser and Members of the Maryland House Appropriations Committee

From: Forrest Gertin, Baltimore City Schools Educator

A student's academic achievement should determine whether they can attend college, not their parents' documentation or tax filing status.

As a high school teacher, I have witnessed firsthand how Maryland's tax documentation requirements for undocumented immigrants have prevented several hardworking, talented students from pursuing higher education. I have several more in my classroom who will face the same barrier unless Maryland changes the law.

I work with some of the most promising students in our state. I have the privilege of coaching a competitive debate team, and just last year, my students earned 3rd place in the national Debate en Español competition. These students, who are undocumented, demonstrate exceptional intellectual rigor, critical thinking skills, and academic potential. Yet, the current law places immense and often insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles in their path toward higher education.

I was recently heartbroken by the story of one of my former students, an undocumented immigrant with straight A's and a dream of serving our country through an ROTC program at a U.S. college. Despite her acceptance and qualifications, she could not meet the documentation requirements to secure appropriate financial aid or in-state tuition. Because the law prevented her from pursuing the college education she earned, she was forced to move back to her home country and is now attending a barber school instead.

HB1530 levels the playing field. It does not give special treatment.

HB1530 would simply eliminate some, but not all, of the additional requirements placed on undocumented students. Undocumented students would still be required to submit all the same documentation for loans and in-state tuition as documented students across the state.

Current law prevents students with all the documentation from attending college.

Even students who do have three years of their parents' tax returns must leap over bureaucratic hurdles to attend college. Undocumented students must first apply as out-of-state residents to Maryland universities. Then, if accepted, they remain classified as out-of-state students. To change that status, parents must file Form 129 with the Maryland Comptroller's Office to obtain three years of tax returns and must request a separate copy for each school their child was accepted to. At the same time, the student has to navigate the loan process, duplicating much of the same paperwork for the MHEC One App. The process is extremely difficult and students are often attempting to overcome this bureaucracy by working with parents who are not fluent in English.

Change cannot wait.

I urge this committee to act with urgency. Another year of waiting to act means another year of deserving students missing out on college.

Sincerely,

Mr. Forrest Gertin | AP Seminar & Honors English II Teacher | National Association of Urban Debate Leagues
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