



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 982 - HIGHER EDUCATION - TUITION EXEMPTION FOR FOSTER CARE RECIPIENTS - ELIGIBILITY - 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 for House Bill 982 (HB 982).

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 982. Under current law, foster youth retain eligibility for a tuition waiver at any Maryland public institution of higher education if they were in foster care for at least one year and exit care of the Department through guardianship, adoption, or reunification with their parent(s) after turning 13 years old. HB 982 proposes lowering the qualifying age to 8 years old, while keeping the other requirements in place. This would promote permanency by encouraging adoptions and guardianships for younger children in the care and custody of the Department.

As youth age in the foster care system, their likelihood of exiting with a permanent family decreases significantly. [Child Trends](#) analysis of data from the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) found that 62% of youth ages 14-21 in the United States exited foster care to legal permanency in 2023. Whereas the comparable figure for children ages 13 and under was 98 percent. Ages 8 - 12 are critical developmental years in a child's life where self-identity begins to form. Achieving legal permanency during this window, supported by the promise of future educational funding, increases the likelihood of positive outcomes as an adult, including mental health, academic achievement, economic stability, and career success.

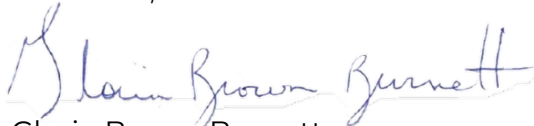
Many prospective adoptive parents and kin guardians live on fixed or modest incomes, and the decision to add a new permanent member to their household is often constrained by the cost of raising a child. The financial support available to a family after they adopt or are legal guardians is less than foster care. Higher education is an additional, significant expense for families.

HB 982 is a direct investment in the Moore-Miller Administration goal of ending childhood poverty, because education is the most effective means of economic mobility. Lowering the foster youth tuition waiver eligible age from 13 to 8 years old provides additional economic stability for families. When families are reunified, the tuition waiver has the potential to break the cycle of generational poverty. It ensures that even if a family has struggled with instability in the past, the state's early intervention protects their child's path to a degree.

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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gloria Brown Burnett". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gloria Brown Burnett
Interim Secretary