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BILL: HB 818 – Higher Education - Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Tuition Exemption and Associated Benefits

COMMITTEE: Appropriations

DATE: March 3, 2026

POSITION: FAVORABLE

The University System of Maryland Student Council (USMSC) is one of four councils established during the restructuring of higher education in Maryland in 1988. USMSC represents the over 178,000 students in the University System of Maryland's 12 institutions and 3 regional higher education centers.

USMSC is in support of House Bill 818, which would require public institutions of higher education to provide free room, board, and required books, course materials, supplies, etc to eligible foster care recipients and homeless youth.

Students who have experienced foster care or homelessness often face tremendous financial and structural barriers to accessing and completing higher education. Although tremendous progress has been made within the state of Maryland to support these students, the reality remains that tuition alone does not represent the true cost of college. Many students still must overcome the true cost of a college education: housing costs, food costs, textbooks, course materials, etc.

By providing those students with a free room, board, and required course materials for students who have experienced foster care and homelessness within the state we can ensure that these students are not forced to choose between covering basic needs and receiving a top notch education.

The need is significant. Nearly 4,000 youth in foster care¹ and approximately 18,000 homeless youth², across the state of Maryland will benefit from this legislation. These students have already proven their resilience by persevering through unimaginable adversity. They should not face further barriers after gaining acceptance to Maryland's top notch institutions of higher education.

For these reasons, the USMSC respectfully urges a favorable report on HB 818.

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¹ The Imprint. (2025). Maryland: Who cares — A national count of foster homes and families. Foster Care Capacity. <https://www.fostercarecapacity.com/states/maryland>

² SchoolHouse Connection and Poverty Solutions at the University of Michigan. (2025). Child and Youth Homelessness Data Profiles, <https://public.tableau.com/authoring/ChildandYouthHomelessnessDataProfiles/National#1>