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March 3, 2026

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

Chairman Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and the Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) respectfully submits this Letter of Information for House Bill 982. House Bill 982 extends the eligibility criteria for a tuition exemption for individuals who were a foster care recipient. Currently, law indicates eligibility for individuals in the foster care system after their 13th birthday; the proposed amendment would change that to an individual's 8th birthday.

MHEC strongly supports efforts to remove barriers to postsecondary access and completion for vulnerable student populations. Foster youth face significant structural and financial challenges in pursuing higher education, and policies that expand stability and support can meaningfully improve persistence and degree attainment outcomes.

While MHEC's initial assessment indicated that the agency's operational or fiscal impact could be accommodated within existing resources, the Commission notes that significantly broadening the eligible population presents administrative challenges similar to other expansions of this benefit. Verification of eligibility for foster care status is complex, highly sensitive, and requires coordination across multiple agencies and institutions. Because this population requires high-touch, individualized support to ensure proper coordination of benefits, processing a larger volume of eligible applicants will place additional responsibilities on existing personnel within the Office of Student Financial Assistance.

MHEC further notes that the most significant fiscal impact of this legislation will be borne by public institutions of higher education. The expanded eligibility criteria will naturally increase the number of students utilizing the tuition exemption, resulting in an increase in foregone tuition revenue. Specifically, this would impact community colleges. For Maryland's community colleges, which rely heavily on local county appropriations, these mandates may create additional fiscal pressures at the local government level.

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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MHEC appreciates the Committee's consideration and remains available to provide additional information as needed.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Affairs.

Yours in Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S K Rai". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

Sanjay Rai

Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission