



March 31, 2026

**Senate Bill 864 (cross-file House Bill 982)— Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility**

**House Appropriations Committee**

**Position: Support**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), we respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 864.

MARFY represents licensed child placement agencies and community-based providers across Maryland that serve children and families through foster care, adoption, kinship support, residential services, and permanency programs. Our members work every day to help children achieve safe, stable, and permanent family environments. Senate Bill 864 supports these goals by strengthening access to higher education opportunities for youth who have experienced foster care while also promoting earlier permanency outcomes.

Senate Bill 864 is simple legislation that can make a life changing impact on children in Maryland.

*“Children like me are passed over all the time for the cute, cuddly toddlers. We don’t get picked first, and we don’t get picked second. But we’ve become resilient although a lot of times we feel dispensable.”* – Eva, age 15

Sadly, this reflects the experience of many children still waiting in the foster care system. [Once a child reaches the age of 10, their chances of being adopted drop by roughly 50%, regardless of how long they have already spent in care.](#) With each additional year, those odds continue to decline, making the path to a permanent, stable family increasingly limited and prolonged.

*“As a child I always knew my life was different and I would just question all the time, like, I would see parents together with their children and I would always wonder why my family doesn’t look like this. Like, why can’t I have this? What did I do wrong?”* - Lily, age 19

[When foster youth talk about permanence,](#) they speak of the longing for a stable, supportive environment where they can build lasting relationships. Permanence is about more than just a roof over their heads; it’s about having consistent, reliable people in their lives and a place where they can form an identity and plan for the future.



Maryland Association of  
Resources for Families & Youth

*“I’ve never been inside of like adoptive or foster home [placements]. All of my placements were placements, like, I went from detention centers to group homes to [mental health] treatment facilities. . . independent livings. I’ve never been, like, placed inside of a home.”*  
- Trinity Mathews, age 23

[Research](#) consistently demonstrates that permanency achieved earlier in childhood leads to better long-term outcomes, including improved emotional well-being, educational stability, and adult self-sufficiency. Policies that support permanency at younger ages help reduce the likelihood that youth will remain in foster care for extended periods or age out without permanent family connections.

Senate Bill 864 does just that. It supports a path to permanency by making one simple policy change, ensuring that one barrier is removed.

**It does not expand the current Tuition Eligibility Waiver to cover anything other than what the state is already offering to pay for when children in foster care age-out without achieving permanency.** All it does is offer a small group of children a better chance at finding a permanent home.

Educational support also plays a meaningful role in permanency decision-making. Families considering adoption or guardianship frequently evaluate long-term financial responsibilities, including education. Ensuring that children remain eligible for tuition assistance regardless of whether permanency occurs before or after age 13 helps families feel more confident in their ability to provide stable, lifelong support. Senate Bill 864 therefore functions not only as an education policy, but also as a permanency-support policy.

Senate Bill 864 aligns education policy with the State’s broader permanency goals. By lowering the eligibility age threshold, the bill removes unintended barriers, encourages earlier stable placements, and strengthens long-term outcomes for youth served by Maryland’s child welfare system.

For these reasons, MARFY respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 864.

**For more information call or email:**

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