

Written Testimony in Support of HB1530

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

From: Ariya Hayes-Lawson, Baltimore City Resident (District 40)

Hello, my name is Ariya Hayes-Lawson and I am a resident of Baltimore City. I have five years of experience working in undergraduate admissions and unequivocally believe in reducing barriers for undocumented students to access low-cost higher education. I am submitting written testimony to support HB1530, which would remove the requirement that undocumented students must submit three years of their parents' tax returns to qualify for in-state tuition and federal loans.

My years working to recruit and engage high school students has shown me how indispensable and critical the voice of undocumented students is to higher education spaces AND how often the extra barriers to afford these institutions prevent students and families from getting in the door. If approved, this bill would go into effect this year, meaning students graduating in spring 2026, who have already received acceptance letters based on the merits of their work in high school, will be able to attend college at an affordable cost. This will undoubtedly have positive implications for these individuals and their families for generations, as well as for the communities who have believed in and poured into them up until this point.

Research shows that nationally, undocumented students are dealt social and systemic hurdles that complicate and inhibit their "social and economic integration, mental well-being, academic performance, and postgraduate options", simply because of the limits placed on their status (Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, 2026). In Maryland, the current burden of proof placed upon undocumented families, only perpetuates this truth, deterring otherwise academically gifted students from matriculating and pursuing higher degrees. This does not have to be the case.

In my years learning and working in higher education, as an undergraduate and graduate student, work study student at both of my institutions, and staff member, I have benefitted from the brilliance, strength, perspective, and diligence of undocumented students. They are necessary to our school cultures; their contributions are undeniable. As it stands, the status quo leaves too many of our students out of these institutions. And their absence is felt immensely by us all.

I am asking you all to please consider passing HB1530 so that we can give undocumented students a fair chance at higher education. Let Maryland be an example of what is possible when we remove barriers and allow ALL of our students equitable access to succeed.

Respectfully,
Ariya Hayes-Lawson