

February 27, 2026
HB818 – Favorable

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of HB 818.

HB 818 removes the final financial barriers preventing some of our most vulnerable young people—foster care recipients and youth experiencing homelessness—from succeeding in higher education.

Many of these students have already overcome extraordinary adversity. Young people who have experienced foster care or homelessness are far less likely to enroll in and complete college than their peers—not because of lack of ability, but because of lack of stability and support. While our state has taken important steps by offering tuition exemptions, tuition is only part of the cost of attending a public institution such as the University of Maryland.

For most students, the real financial barriers are room, board, and required course materials. A tuition waiver does not pay for housing during winter break. It does not cover meal plans. It does not purchase required textbooks, lab supplies, or equipment. For students without family financial support or a safe place to return to, these expenses can be the difference between staying enrolled and dropping out.

At the Student Homelessness Initiative Partnership of Frederick County, we've seen first-hand that college is often the key to lifting vulnerable students out of homelessness permanently. College graduates are more likely to secure stable employment, earn higher wages, rely less on public assistance, and contribute more in taxes over their lifetimes. By helping them complete their education, we reduce the likelihood of future housing insecurity, unemployment, and involvement with other costly public systems.

Our organization assisted 72 high school seniors experiencing homelessness with college and financial aid applications in 2025. Each one of those students required a plan not just for tuition, but for the many additional expenses they were likely to encounter after enrolling in college. For many this required significant efforts including numerous lengthy scholarship applications, working full time while attending school, and declining certain opportunities like classes that require fees. These efforts will be required for our students every year that they are enrolled in college and are ultimately an additional hurdle they need to overcome to remain connected to education.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the passing of HB 818. Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to expanding opportunity for Maryland's most vulnerable students.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MM', written in a cursive style.

Melissa Muntz
Executive Director
Student Homelessness Initiative Partnership of Frederick County