

March 3, 2026

House Appropriations Committee

Maryland General Assembly

Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

For nearly 16 years, I have worked at the CollegeBound Foundation in Baltimore City, an organization dedicated to helping Baltimore City Public School students get to and through college. I began my career as a high school college advisor and saw firsthand the heartbreaking reality of students who could not attend college because they needed full-time jobs simply to secure a place to live. Many were homeless youth disconnected from their families, forced to choose basic survival over higher education.

For the past six and a half years, in my role as Director of College Success, I have continued to witness how profoundly housing instability affects college students. I see every day the devastating impact that unstable housing has on students' wellbeing, academic progress, and their ability to persist toward a degree. HB 818 is not an abstract policy proposal, it responds to an urgent and recurring barrier faced by the homeless and foster-care youth we serve. This bill would ensure that students receive the funding required to secure campus housing and relieve them of one of the many obstacles they must overcome to stay enrolled and succeed.

Stable on-campus housing is one of the strongest predictors of college completion. Without it, students resort to unsafe or unstable alternatives, including couch surfing, returning to harmful environments, or experiencing episodes of homelessness, all of which undermine their ability to stay enrolled and make academic progress. HB 818 addresses this issue head-on by ensuring that students experiencing homelessness or foster care have access to the housing stability necessary to thrive in college. This bill is not only about housing, it is about safety, persistence, and degree completion.

One of our students, Sam, began his first semester at Coppin State University facing significant housing instability. During his freshman year, his family was evicted. Because Sam was over 18 and no longer in high school, his mother viewed him as fully responsible for himself. She began couch surfing separately and told Sam it was now his responsibility to find places where he could couch surf. Securing safe and stable housing has been an ongoing crisis each semester. While Coppin has been compassionate in approving accommodations for Sam to remain on campus during mandatory breaks and over the summer, those housing periods must still be funded. A student already navigating immense structural barriers should not also have to wonder where he will sleep. Sam is now entering

his senior year, and this remains a challenge we continue to support him through.

Another student we support, Erryn, a Morgan State University scholar, had to leave her home due to unsafe conditions and has no connection with her parents. We connected her with St. Ambrose Housing, which has become an essential, yet frequently oversubscribed, resource for college students experiencing homelessness. However, space is limited, and many students in similar circumstances cannot be placed. For students like Erryn, on-campus housing is the safest and most stable option, yet without financial support like that provided by HB 818, it is simply not accessible.

Lastly, research overwhelmingly supports the impact of campus housing. A large-scale national study by the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I), involving more than 75,000 students across 76 residential campuses, found that living on campus has a clear and profound impact on student persistence and engagement, which strongly predicts retention and graduation.

For these reasons, I strongly urge a favorable report on HB 818.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Covahey
Director of College Success
CollegeBound Foundation