



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 3, 2026

HB 818

**Higher Education - Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Tuition
Exemption and Associated Benefits**

House Appropriations Committee

Position: FAVORABLE

The Maryland Catholic Conference offers this testimony in support of House Bill 818. The Catholic Conference is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

House Bill 818 makes alterations to the State provision of tuition waivers for foster care recipients and homeless youth. The bill would expand the program, which the Conference has supported over the last decade through various legislative changes, to include room and board in the exempted costs for higher education for foster care recipients and homeless youth

As the Church values the dignity of human life above all else, we must do all we can to remedy homelessness through promoting "education, access to health care, and above all employment, for it is through free, creative, participatory and mutually supportive labor that human beings express and enhance the dignity of their lives." (*Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 192*). It is thus imperative that our state provide homeless youth the opportunity to obtain a college degree, thus affording them the ability to obtain gainful employment and provide for themselves a place to call "home" of their own. It is of parallel importance to ensure that Maryland provides such opportunities for foster care recipients entrusted to the State's care.

Homeless youth and foster care recipients are often be left to care for themselves upon reaching college age. The State's provision of tuition waivers is a primary way for these children to have hope for a better future. To charge foster care recipients and homeless youth, who are already exempt from tuition for room and board presents an unjust irony. Where their lives have been often mired in housing insecurity, it is a just proposition to ensure that housing be included in their cost exemptions while pursuing their higher education. Therefore, we urge this Committee to support anything to expand upon this program and issue a favorable report on House Bill 818.