

THE COALITION TO PROTECT MARYLAND'S CHILDREN

Our Mission: To combine and amplify the power of organizations and citizens working together to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. We strive to secure budgetary and public policy resources to make meaningful and measurable improvements in safety, permanence, and wellbeing.



**HB0982 - Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care
Recipients - Eligibility
House Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2026**

Position: SUPPORT

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children is a consortium of organizations and individuals formed in 1992 who are concerned about the care of Maryland's most vulnerable children and work together to educate and promote meaningful child welfare reform. **CPMC urges a favorable report on HB0982 - Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility.**

Our coalition has always been supportive of the work of the Maryland General Assembly in passing laws making the costs of college education more feasible for children who have entered foster care in our state. HB0982 is an important policy change that supports permanency for children in foster care by expanding eligibility for Maryland's tuition waiver program to youth who entered out-of-home placement at a younger age.

Under current law, children who achieve permanency before age 13 may lose eligibility for higher education benefits, creating an unintended barrier to early adoption or guardianship. Lowering the eligibility age to 8 years old helps ensure that children who find stable, permanent homes earlier in childhood are not disadvantaged. Providing educational supports regardless of the child's age at placement removes a disincentive for older children to permanency and reinforces the message that Maryland values early stability for children. Many adoptive and guardianship families consider long-term financial stability when making decisions about permanency. Ensuring access to tuition assistance regardless of the child's age at placement helps families feel more confident in their ability to provide long-term support and stability.

We did have a suggestion that was shared with the bill sponsor about clarification over the eligibility start time, which we believe was shared with the bill's sponsor: *Resided in an out-of-home placement for at least 1 year, and was placed into guardianship, was adopted, or reunited with at least one of the individual's parents on or after the individual's 8th birthday* (p2, lines 4-6). It is for these reasons that the Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children **urges a favorable report on HB0982 - Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility.**¹

¹ Members of CPMC represented by this written testimony include the American Academy of Pediatrics - Maryland Chapter, Arrow Child & Family Ministries, Child Justice, Center for Hope, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA - Baltimore County), Citizens Review Board for Children, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, National Association of Social Workers – MD (NASW), and the State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (SCCAN).