

SB0864 FAV CASE.pdf

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Position: FAV



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March 27, 2026

Maryland House Appropriations Committee

Senate Bill 864 — Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility

Position: SUPPORT

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Debbie B. Riley, LCMFT, Chief Executive Officer of the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), and I am writing to express strong support for Senate Bill 864 as it moves through the House. C.A.S.E. is a national organization that works across every level of the permanency ecosystem to ensure families stay together and thrive. In Maryland, C.A.S.E. offers adoption-competent therapy for families and children, both pre- and post-permanency, as well as case management services and child-focused recruitment services using the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) model to identify legal permanency for Maryland children in foster care.

Senate Bill 864 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.

Research consistently demonstrates that younger children are more likely to achieve permanent placements, while the likelihood of adoption decreases as children grow older. National data show that the majority of children adopted from foster care are under age 10, and older youth often wait significantly longer for permanency or age out of the system without a permanent family.

Providing educational supports regardless of the child's age at placement removes a disincentive to permanency and reinforces the message that Maryland values early stability for children.

The importance of permanency cannot be overstated. Children who grow up in stable family environments experience better educational, emotional, and long-term life outcomes than those who remain in foster care or age out without permanent connections. Each year, approximately 20,000 youth nationwide age out of foster care without permanent families, facing increased risks of homelessness, unemployment, and poor educational attainment.

Policies that encourage earlier permanency help reduce these risks and improve outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood.

Educational support is also a powerful permanency tool. 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. Senate Bill 864 recognizes that permanency achieved earlier in childhood should be encouraged, not unintentionally penalized. By lowering the eligibility threshold, Maryland strengthens incentives for stable family placements while continuing to support youth as they transition to independence.

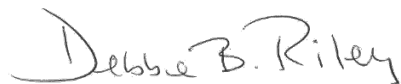
C.A.S.E. serves over 600 children both pre- and post-placement each year, and the issue of tuition exemption is one that poses a significant barrier to permanency. In our WWK and pre-placement counseling services, C.A.S.E. has seen prospective adoptive placements delay permanency to ensure that their adopted child will have access to tuition assistance. In some cases, prospective adoptive parents reconsider moving forward altogether.

Our WWK program currently has two children in this situation. Both have identified permanency resources, yet neither child is 13. In each case, the resource has indicated they would proceed immediately if tuition assistance were guaranteed. Delaying permanency creates additional uncertainty, may harm the child, and ultimately places the permanency opportunity at risk.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 864. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Debbie Riley, LCMFT, CEO

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Debbie B. Riley".

Center for Adoption Support and Education

SB0864_Higher_Education_Tuition_Exemption_for_Fost

Uploaded by: Cecilia Plante

Position: FAV



TESTIMONY FOR SB0864

Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients - Eligibility

Bill Sponsor: Senator Washington

Committee: Appropriations

Organization Submitting: Maryland Legislative Coalition

Person Submitting: Cecilia Plante, co-chair

Position: FAVORABLE

I am submitting this testimony in favor of SB0864 on behalf of the Maryland Legislative Coalition. The Maryland Legislative Coalition is an association of activists - individuals and grassroots groups in every district in the state. We are unpaid citizen lobbyists and our Coalition supports well over 30,000 members.

It is important to a small, but very vulnerable population of Marylanders to get a chance for a college education. For foster-care youths, this is life changing. However, coming off of foster care, most of these youths do not have the means to afford such an education. In that case, waivers of tuition are critical, and qualifying for a waiver is a very big deal

This bill changes the qualifying age for anyone who was in foster care from age 13 to age 8.

This would mean that more foster care youths can qualify and it is a giant step forward in terms of getting their lives on track. These youths are some of the most vulnerable residents in our state, and we must help them achieve their promise in any way we can.

We support this bill and recommend a **FAVORABLE** report in committee.

SB864- Maryland Legal Aid - FAV260331 Written Test

Uploaded by: Erica LeMon

Position: FAV



**SB864 - Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility
March 31, 2026
Position: FAVORABLE**

Maryland Legal Aid submits written and oral testimony on SB0864 at the request of its sponsor, Senator Alonzo Washington.

Maryland Legal Aid asks that the Committee report **favorably** on SB0864, which alters the definition of a "foster care recipient" to mean an individual who resided in an out-of-home placement on or after the individual's 8th birthday rather than 13th birthday for purposes of determining eligibility for the foster youth tuition exemption. Maryland Legal Aid serves residents in each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions, providing free legal services to the State's low-income and vulnerable residents in a range of civil legal matters. Maryland Legal Aid is Maryland's largest civil non-profit law firm, representing vulnerable young people in Child in Need of Assistance (CINA) matters across the State. This proposed legislation is an important measure to provide financial support for former foster children pursuing higher education.

Maryland Legal Aid's staff represent thousands of children in CINA and Guardianship ("TPR") proceedings throughout the state. Our attorneys represent children from infancy to young adulthood. As a result of its extensive work in the field, Maryland Legal Aid has expertise in matters concerning child welfare, children in foster care, and particularly, youth who are aging out of foster care.

Under current law and eligibility practice, the tuition waiver reaches (among others) youth who remained in out-of-home placement through key milestones or who spent at least one year in care on or after age 13 and subsequently achieved permanency through reunification, guardianship, or adoption.¹ SB 864 recognizes that the academic harm from early childhood instability does not begin at age 13. By shifting the qualifying age threshold from 13 to 8, the bills align the waiver with educational research and lived experience: early disruptions to schooling and development often produce long-term effects visible in middle and high school achievement, readiness, and graduation trajectories. The earlier age threshold will therefore reach youth whose educational gaps began in elementary school, enabling them to pursue postsecondary opportunities they might otherwise forgo due to cost.

Moreover, by improving the predictability that tuition costs will be covered, SB 864 also supports permanency decisions. Caregivers considering custody or guardianship may hesitate due to

¹ See Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 15 106.1 (defining eligibility, including the "on or after age 13" pathway); Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center (MLDSC), Foster Care and Higher Education Participation (2023), https://mldscenter.maryland.gov/egov/publications/CenterReports/OutofHomePlacementandHigherEducationParticipation/FosterCare_Report%202023_suppressed_final.pdf. Center, Foster Care and Higher Education Participation (2023) (describing waiver criteria and history).

uncertainty about meeting a youth's future educational needs. Strengthening and clarifying waiver eligibility reduces that uncertainty and can encourage permanency options that serve a child's best interests.

We do not believe that SB864 will adversely affect the finances of Maryland's Higher Education institutions. We should not assume that these former foster youth are going to college, and that the tuition waiver simply takes those tuition funds away from the college. The MLDSC's findings show that foster youth are less likely to enroll and less likely to complete college without targeted financial supports; the waiver, in many cases, enables enrollment that would not occur at all absent the aid. In other words, the counterfactual is not "full pay" tuition; it is non-enrollment. Further, given that the majority of foster youth who do enroll attend community colleges and rely on federal and state aid mixtures, the waiver functions as a catalyst within an aid package rather than a standalone subsidy displacing otherwise available institutional revenue.

Maryland is well-positioned to monitor the impacts of SB 864 / HB 982 through the MLDSC, which is statutorily required to produce annual dashboards on foster youth participation in higher education, including enrollment, aid, and graduation outcomes.² The 2023 MLDS report provides the baseline metrics cited above and can continue to inform the General Assembly's oversight as eligibility expands.

Maryland Legal Aid urges the Committee to issue a FAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 864 and urge its ultimate passage. If you have any questions, please contact: Erica I. LeMon, Advocacy Director for Children's Rights at elemon@mdl.org (410) 951-7648 or (410) 935-0937.

² See Md. Code Ann., Educ. § 24 703.1(c) (dashboard requirements).

SB864_APP_MARFY_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Therese Hessler

Position: FAV



March 31, 2026

Senate Bill 864 (cross-file House Bill 982)— Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility

House Appropriations Committee

Position: Support

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), we respectfully submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill 864.

MARFY represents licensed child placement agencies and community-based providers across Maryland that serve children and families through foster care, adoption, kinship support, residential services, and permanency programs. Our members work every day to help children achieve safe, stable, and permanent family environments. Senate Bill 864 supports these goals by strengthening access to higher education opportunities for youth who have experienced foster care while also promoting earlier permanency outcomes.

Senate Bill 864 is simple legislation that can make a life changing impact on children in Maryland.

“Children like me are passed over all the time for the cute, cuddly toddlers. We don’t get picked first, and we don’t get picked second. But we’ve become resilient although a lot of times we feel dispensable.” – Eva, age 15

Sadly, this reflects the experience of many children still waiting in the foster care system. [Once a child reaches the age of 10, their chances of being adopted drop by roughly 50%, regardless of how long they have already spent in care.](#) With each additional year, those odds continue to decline, making the path to a permanent, stable family increasingly limited and prolonged.

“As a child I always knew my life was different and I would just question all the time, like, I would see parents together with their children and I would always wonder why my family doesn’t look like this. Like, why can’t I have this? What did I do wrong?” - Lily, age 19

[When foster youth talk about permanence,](#) they speak of the longing for a stable, supportive environment where they can build lasting relationships. Permanence is about more than just a roof over their heads; it’s about having consistent, reliable people in their lives and a place where they can form an identity and plan for the future.



Maryland Association of
Resources for Families & Youth

“I’ve never been inside of like adoptive or foster home [placements]. All of my placements were placements, like, I went from detention centers to group homes to [mental health] treatment facilities. . . independent livings. I’ve never been, like, placed inside of a home.”
- Trinity Mathews, age 23

[Research](#) consistently demonstrates that permanency achieved earlier in childhood leads to better long-term outcomes, including improved emotional well-being, educational stability, and adult self-sufficiency. Policies that support permanency at younger ages help reduce the likelihood that youth will remain in foster care for extended periods or age out without permanent family connections.

Senate Bill 864 does just that. It supports a path to permanency by making one simple policy change, ensuring that one barrier is removed.

It does not expand the current Tuition Eligibility Waiver to cover anything other than what the state is already offering to pay for when children in foster care age-out without achieving permanency. All it does is offer a small group of children a better chance at finding a permanent home.

Educational support also plays a meaningful role in permanency decision-making. Families considering adoption or guardianship frequently evaluate long-term financial responsibilities, including education. Ensuring that children remain eligible for tuition assistance regardless of whether permanency occurs before or after age 13 helps families feel more confident in their ability to provide stable, lifelong support. Senate Bill 864 therefore functions not only as an education policy, but also as a permanency-support policy.

Senate Bill 864 aligns education policy with the State’s broader permanency goals. By lowering the eligibility age threshold, the bill removes unintended barriers, encourages earlier stable placements, and strengthens long-term outcomes for youth served by Maryland’s child welfare system.

For these reasons, MARFY respectfully urges the Committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 864.

For more information call or email:

Therese M. Hessler | 301-503-2576 | therese@ashlargr.com

Fiscal Note Response (Foster Care Tuition Waiver).

Uploaded by: Zach Levin

Position: FAV

Response to DLS Fiscal Note on SB864/HB982

The DLS fiscal note characterizes the cost of SB864/HB982 as “potentially significant” but does not cite a specific number or range. Applying the statistics that DLS itself references from the [Maryland Longitudinal Data System Center](#) (MLDS), we calculate the likely annual cost of lowering the age threshold from 13 to 8 years old to be around **\$153,000-\$204,000**.

The path from foster care placement to college enrollment is narrow. Starting with the 185 youth ages 8-12 who left care in FY2025, the realistic number who will ever use a new tuition waiver is approximately **16 students annually per cohort**.

Stage	Input	Result	Source
Youth leaving care (ages 8–12), FY2025	n/a	185	DHS FY2025 Data
Graduate high school	x 47%	~87	MSDE 2025 Report Card
Attend college (any)	x 57%	~50	MLDS Table 1 (Waiver Eligible)
Attend in-state	x 92%	~46	MLDS Table 1 (Waiver Eligible)
Attend community college	x 75%	~35	MLDS Table 2 (Waiver Eligible)
Attend 4-year institution	x 15%	~7	MLDS Table 2 (Waiver Eligible)
Actually claim the waiver, attends in-state college (Take-up rate)*	x 34%	~16	MLDS Table 4
NEW WAIVER RECIPIENTS PER COHORT		~16	

*From 2011-2021 the Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients was awarded to 34% of eligible foster youth per MLDS data

Estimated Cost

Applying the 2024 actual waiver cost of \$2,387 per community college recipient (MHEC, cited in fiscal note) and the full \$11,192 headline rate for 4-year institutions (MHEC, cited in fiscal note), using the 34% take-up rate:

Cost Component	Students	Tuition Rate	Cost / Cohort
Community college (75% of 46 in-state × 34%)	~12	\$2,387 (MHEC actual avg.)	~\$28,600
4-year institution (15% of 46 in-state × 34%)	~2	\$11,192 (full headline rate)	~\$22,400
TOTAL COST PER NEW COHORT			~\$51,000

At steady state, 3-4 cohorts are enrolled simultaneously (consistent with MLDS average enrollment age of 19.85 and degree attainment age of 24.23). Total annual cost at steady state: approximately \$153,000–\$204,000.¹

Even at the high end, the annual cost is under \$250,000, spread out across Maryland’s 17 public four-year universities and 16 community colleges. No individual institution will see more than a handful of new waiver recipients per year. The per-campus fiscal impact is negligible.

¹ **Steady-state methodology:** Each annual cohort of newly eligible youth produces approximately 16 waiver claimants at a cost of ~\$51,000. Because the waiver covers enrollment for up to 10 years (or until a bachelor’s degree is earned), students from multiple prior cohorts remain active in any given year. The 3–4 cohort multiplier is derived from MLDS Table 7, which shows an average age at first college enrollment of 19.85 and an average age at degree attainment of 24.23, a span of approximately 4.4 years. This means at any given time, roughly 3–4 annual cohorts of students are simultaneously drawing on the waiver, producing a steady-state annual cost of $\$51,000 \times 3-4 = \$153,000-\$204,000$. This estimate assumes relatively steady enrollment progression. MLDS data shows 52–56% of foster youth are retained to a second year of college (Table 5), meaning some students exit the system earlier than the 4.4-year average and some persist longer. These effects are partially offsetting. The 3–4 multiplier is therefore a reasonable central estimate, though actual annual costs may vary modestly year to year as cohort sizes and enrollment patterns fluctuate.

SB864 Written Testimony for APP.pdf

Uploaded by: Zach Levin

Position: FAV

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 864: Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients - Eligibility

March 31, 2026

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and esteemed members of the House Appropriations Committee. My name is Zach Levin, and I serve as Chief of Staff for Delegate Bernice Mireku-North, but today I'm here to share my personal story and offer strong support for Senate Bill 864 – Higher Education: Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients – Eligibility.

My partner, Genevieve, is the legal guardian of her now 18-year-old sister, Julienne. When Julienne was 14, her world turned upside down. Her parents were deemed unfit to care for her, and she entered Maryland's foster care system where she suffered bullying and financial abuse. Genevieve, just 23 years old, stepped up to take responsibility, and by the time Julienne turned 16, Genevieve became her legal guardian.

Since then, Genevieve and I have worked tirelessly to give Julienne the stability, community, and sense of normalcy every young person deserves. Julienne loves dinosaurs and it was her passion for the field and dreams of one day becoming a paleontologist that sustained her through those tough years in foster care. But when it came to college, our combined salaries simply weren't enough to cover tuition for a young person without a financial safety net. That's when we learned about the Foster Care Tuition Waiver. Through this program, Julienne has been able to learn, grow, and follow her dreams without the crushing weight of debt or financial uncertainty holding her back.

From a human standpoint, it's difficult to explain why Julienne should have access to such an amazing program, but someone who exited foster care younger than 13 should not. We should not be telling that foster youth "You found a family too early to qualify."

Senate Bill 864 makes a narrow but important adjustment to Maryland's existing Tuition Waiver for Foster Care Recipients. Under current law, a young person who is adopted or placed in guardianship only qualifies for the tuition waiver if they were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday. Senate Bill 864 lowers that age threshold to 8. In doing so, the bill corrects a gap in current law so that children who achieve permanency earlier in life are not excluded from support later on.

From a fiscal perspective, this bill is about policy alignment and long-term return on investment.

College is expensive. For many families who step forward to adopt or assume guardianship of a child from foster care, finances are already tight. Under current law, if a child exits foster care before age 13, they lose access to the tuition waiver. That means a family considering adoption or guardianship when a child is 8-12 must weigh the financial burdens of supporting that child's

higher education. In other words, the structure of the waiver can unintentionally create a financial disincentive for early placement.

Maryland policy should encourage permanency earlier, not create technical rules that may complicate family decisions. Lowering the age to 8 aligns the tuition waiver with the reality that many children achieve permanency in their elementary school years.

But beyond the data, this bill is about expanding accessibility to a truly transformative program for foster youth.

It is about the child who enters foster care after experiencing instability and trauma, who is adopted at age twelve into a permanent, loving home. That child does everything we hope for, they stabilize, they grow, and against all odds graduate from high school, and then, at 18, they discover they do not qualify for the same tuition support as a peer who remained in care until 13. Not because they needed less help. Not because their trauma was less significant. But because they found permanency sooner.

I'm proud to share that Julienne has been accepted into the University of Maryland, including its First-Year Innovation and Research Experience (FIRE) program, one of the university's most prestigious undergraduate research initiatives. She's thriving, and Genevieve and I are so proud of her and so grateful for the foster care tuition waiver for making her dreams possible.

But for every Julienne who benefits, there are many children and families who cannot access this support. Senate Bill 864 fixes that, ensuring that children who find permanency early are not penalized later. For all these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 864.

SB0864 CPMC FAVA APP.pdf

Uploaded by: Diana Philip

Position: FWA

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.



SB0864 - Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients - Eligibility

**House Appropriations Committee
March 31, 2026**

Position: SUPPORT with amendment

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 with amendment report on SB0864 - 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. SB0864 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 shared an amendment with the bill sponsor about clarification over the eligibility start time, but it was voted out of committee before it was drafted by legislative services. Page 2, lines 8-10: (B) 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.

It is for these reasons that **CPMC urges a favorable report with amendment on SB0864 - 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, Citizens Review Board for Children, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA - Baltimore County), Citizens Review Board for Children, Everstand, The Family Tree, Maryland Association of Resources for Families and Youth (MARFY), Maryland Legal Aid, Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence, National Association of Social Workers – MD (NASW), the State Council on Child Abuse & Neglect (SCCAN), and individual members of the coalition.

The Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children

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