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Written Testimony in Support of HB1530

To: Chair Feldman and the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

From: Yudelkis Castellanos, Baltimore City Schools Student

Hello, my name is Yudelkis Castellanos and I am a 12th grade student at Forest Park High School in Baltimore City. I am the daughter of a single mother, and I immigrated to the United States from Guatemala when I was young. I am currently the valedictorian of my class and recently matched with the highly competitive QuestBridge National Scholarship. I am submitting written testimony to support HB1530, which would remove the requirements that undocumented students must submit three years of their parents' tax returns to qualify for in-state tuition and federal loans.

For many students like me, access to higher education is not just a dream, but the only path to a more stable future.

It is not a secret that many families come to this country hoping to find better opportunities than the ones they were born into. It is also not a secret that inequality in the world means that some places have opportunities that others can only dream of. Many people literally climb mountains and cross borders in order to reach those opportunities. If I could share all the stories my friends have told me about their journeys to the American dream, I would not finish today.

However, even after overcoming so many obstacles to get here, another wall is placed right in front of the finish line. Many families come to this country with their children hoping to give them a better future and end generational struggles. Yet the system often forces parents to work in conditions that do not allow them to file taxes, which creates barriers for their children later.

It is heartbreaking to see many of those children, my friends, not attend college simply because they cannot provide this paperwork. They have spent years studying late at night, participating in extracurricular activities, and adapting to a completely new education system and culture. Their ability to attend college should depend on the hard work they put into their education, not on documents their parents cannot provide.

Fortunately, I was able to win a competitive national scholarship that will give me a full ride to a prestigious university. Without that opportunity, I would not be able to attend higher education. But many talented and hardworking students do not receive opportunities like that.

HB1530 would give those students a fair chance to pursue their dreams and their parents' dreams of providing better opportunities for their children. Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right, and access to it should not depend on barriers that students cannot control. By removing this requirement, Maryland can help more students reach their potential and improve the lives of many families across the state. Maryland has always valued education and opportunity, and this bill would help the state live up to those values.

Once again, I am asking you all to please consider passing HB1530 so that we can give undocumented students a fair chance at higher education. The pursuit of happiness should not come with barriers that prevent hardworking students from reaching the future they have worked so hard to build.

Respectfully,

Yudelkis Castellanos