



**PRINCE GEORGE'S
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Transforming lives.

**House Appropriations Committee
HB 415 – Higher Education - Maryland Community College Promise Scholarship -
Revisions
Testimony by
Thelma L. Ross, Director of Student Financial Aid
February 11, 2020**

Position: Support

Good afternoon, Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Jackson and members of the committee. I am Thelma Ross, director of student financial aid, at Prince George's Community College. I appreciate the opportunity to join you today to discuss Prince George's Community College's support for HB 415, and I would like to thank Delegate Barnes for sponsoring the proposed amendments.

We are all aware of what it takes to complete college – time, commitment, perseverance, family support, geographic access, and financial resources. We also know that Maryland's community colleges are a good investment for the State. Annually, we touch thousands of students and their families through credit and non-credit programs designed to support students seeking the associate degree, transferring to four-year colleges or entering the workforce.

The proposed amendments will streamline the award process, eliminate barriers, and expand eligibility. Each amendment will help to increase access and provide opportunity to more Prince George's county residents.

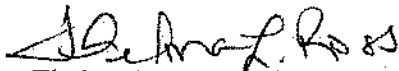
Annually **students are asked to start the application process for financial aid October 1st.** The earlier starting period, along with using tax information from the prior-prior year, allows the student to get information to colleges sooner which gives the college the opportunity to provide award information to students earlier. The proposed amendment allowing the Promise scholarship to be administered after federal and state financial aid is awarded and before local promise scholarships or institutional aid is awarded gives students time to make informed decisions about how to pay for their postsecondary education.

During the inaugural year of the Maryland Community College Promise scholarship, Prince George's Community College students expressed reservation about accepting a scholarship with the potential to convert to a loan. With the national student loan debt level continuing to increase, our students want to be able to pursue higher education within their financial means. The data from the 2016 Economic Modeling Specialist International study, indicated 88% of Maryland community college graduates stay and work in Maryland upon completing their course of study. By removing this service obligation, students will be afforded the chance to use a scholarship that pays up to \$5,000 to pursue a college degree or credential without worrying about future financial obligations.

Removing the requirement that recipients can only be two years out of high school would expand eligibility to all first-time college going students who meet the criteria. There are many reasons why students do not progress directly to a post-secondary institution, for example, unexpected family challenges, uncertainty of career interest, and lack of experience in the workforce to realize their need for additional education and training for advancement. This amendment has the potential to give scholarship access to slightly older Prince George's county residents coming to the college seeking a degree or credential.

With a college degree or credential, these individuals, who are our families, our friends, and our neighbors expand the County's economic base through their higher incomes, while the businesses that employ them also become more productive through the students' added skills. These benefits together with the associated ripple effects, contribute millions in taxable income to the County economy each year.

We know there is on-going work to be done to insure this scholarship reaches the students it is intended to serve, and we will continue to work with the Maryland Higher Education Commission and the Maryland Association of Community Colleges to achieve this outcome.



Thelma L. Ross, Director of Student Financial Aid
Prince George's Community College