

Testimony before the House Appropriations Committee

House Bill 216: Higher Education - Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Alterations and Reports

****SUPPORT WITH AMENDMENT****

February 3, 2021

Maryland's Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers represents social workers statewide. **We support House Bill 216:** Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth - Alterations and Reports with **an amendment to raise the age limit for young adults to enroll from 25 to 26.**

House Bill 216 changes the way the status of homeless youth is verified; enables tuition waiver recipients to have priority for on-campus housing; requires an appeals process, and more.

Eliminating or at least mitigating the barrier of college tuition is an important strategy to encourage foster youth and those who are homeless to pursue higher education. Adults with a college education are higher wage earners; on an annual basis, those with a bachelor's degree earn about \$32,000 more than those whose highest degree is a high school diploma. This is a gap that continues to widen.

Why raise the age limit beyond which foster and homeless youth can enroll from 25 to 26? The adult brain isn't fully developed until age least age 25, and our foster and unaccompanied homeless youth have typically experienced a series of traumas that result in challenges growing into productive and self-sufficient adulthood. Despite an initial lack of interest in college, some may be more ready to enroll by 26.

In summary, we urge a favorable report for House Bill 216 to make changes in the current tuition waiver law to eliminate obstacles and encourage higher attendance numbers. We ask only that the age limit at which young people can enroll be raised by one year, to age 26, as yet another strategy to eliminate barriers and encourage participation in higher education.

Submitted by:

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