

To: The Honorable Chairwoman Maggie McIntosh and members of the Appropriations Committee
From: Rachel White, JD, Child Welfare Policy Director
Re: **HB216- Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth**
Date: February 3, 2021
Position: **SUPPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on **HB 216- Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth**. Advocates for Children and Youth **supports this bill**.

Maryland proudly led the country when the General Assembly unanimously passed bipartisan legislation in 2014 establishing a tuition exemption for unaccompanied homeless youth attending public colleges and universities. The legislature recognized the promise of higher education to provide a pathway out of poverty and homelessness for youth who had overcome momentous barriers to achieve college readiness. ***Despite laudable legislative intent, Maryland's tuition exemption for homeless youth is out of step with other states and is failing our students.***

Challenges with the existing legislation include ineligibility for youth who are currently homeless and accompanied by their parent or caregiver. For example, a youth who is living with his parent in car is ineligible as was the case for a student at University of Maryland College Park. A second challenge includes requiring youth to certify that they are homeless every year which deters them from seeking housing causing them to choose between an education to mitigate their circumstances or housing. A third challenge is a lack of a uniformed process to determine who qualifies for the tuition waiver and no grievance or appeals process for students who are denied- this change applies about youth experiencing homelessness and youth who qualify for the tuition waiver due to foster care involvement.

HB 216 improves Maryland's tuition exemption for youth experiencing foster care and homelessness providing increased access to higher education and a pathway out of poverty for talented Maryland students by eliminating the recertification requirement, expanding eligibility to accompanied homeless youth, and creating an appeals process.

Expanding eligibility to accompanied youth experiencing homelessness may impact the fiscal note, however the cost savings to the state exponentially outweighs the cost of the potential fiscal impact. Investing in higher education access for youth experiencing homelessness results in considerable savings and increased revenue to the State over time. For instance, reduced reliance on government benefits and rates of incarceration results in savings to the State, and reduced unemployment and higher earnings result in increased revenue.

In addition, those who graduated college are 3.5 times less likely to be impoverished and nearly five times less likely to be imprisoned. In all, lifetime government expenditures are \$82,000 lower for college graduates than for those with high school degrees.¹

For the reasons stated above, we urge this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 216 to mitigate existing barriers to accessing higher education for youth experiencing homelessness throughout the state.

¹ Trostel, Lumina Foundation, "It's Not Just the Money," 2015.