

Testimony in Support of HB 216

Higher Education – Tuition Exemption for Foster Care Recipients and Homeless Youth

Delegate Valentino-Smith - Appropriations Committee • February 3rd, 2021

Members of the Prince George's County Youth Action Board

Prince George's County, Maryland

Delegate Valentino-Smith and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to give our testimony in support of House Bill 216, which will improve Maryland's tuition waiver for youth experiencing homelessness.

We believe that HB 216 is important because it will remove unnecessary obstacles for homeless youth that are trying to attend college providing better opportunities for them to achieve their goals. Most importantly, allowing access to stable housing while attending the institution will provide them with the support needed to pursue higher education. We are asking you to consider removing the annual recertification for the waiver. Annual recertification often puts youth in a position that makes it difficult to reapply because of a potential loss of documents or changes in circumstances, possibly resulting in re-traumatizing them. With the decrease in employment opportunities or loss of jobs due to COVID-19, schools are completely unaffordable to a person who is homeless and unemployed. Adjusting the bill will meet the needs of a youth that have been affected by COVID-19.

This bill will allow homeless youth the option to attend school, prevent youth from searching for alternative ways to survive, and break the stigma of how homeless youth are viewed currently (as one who is lazy, does not want a proper job or education, etc.). Youth who are currently enrolled or considering enrolling with the waiver can also receive work study within the institution. Overall, the Tuition Waiver Bill will bring an increased awareness to the topic of homeless youth and young adults in the state of Maryland and nationwide.

Education is the building block that will ensure the success of a youth. This can be the support for which a homeless youth needs to be successful. They will be able to focus on other areas of life such as mental health, employment, and recreational activities – please make sure students struggling with housing instability during and after the Covid-19 pandemic can access education.

We strongly urge you to support HB 216.

Thank you for your consideration,

The Prince Georges County Youth Action Board

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