

**TESTIMONY OF PAUL GASS
IN SUPPORT OF SB 526**

**COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
MARYLAND STATE SENATE**

Feb. 25, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Committee. I write this letter in support of Senate Bill 526 which would establish a Legal Education Success Collaborative in the State of Maryland and to advocate for continued and augmented State financial support for the Program. I work with the current incarnation of the Legal Education Success Collaborative known as the Fannie Angelos Program for Academic Excellence.

In my role as counselor to Coppin State University students who are planning to pursue graduate studies, I have served as campus liaison for the Fannie Angelos Program. Through more than ten years working with Professors Mike Higginbotham and Mike Meyerson, founders of the Fannie Angelos program, I have seen the incredible success of the Program and of the Coppin scholars who have benefitted from its rigorous mentoring. The students that I advise face financial barriers to graduate professional programs such as law school. These barriers are often insurmountable, and students are forced to reconsider career plans. The scholarship support offered by the Fannie Angelos Program is exceptionally rare in the field of law and has had a dramatic impact not only on the lives of students but on diversity in the legal profession as well.

More than fifteen Coppin students have benefitted from the support of the Fannie Angelos Program. Seven have completed their J.D. at University of Baltimore; two others completed their studies at the University of Maryland and Georgetown University. Six of those graduates are now members of the Maryland State Bar Association. Five former Coppin students are currently working towards their J.D. at the University of Baltimore.

While the numbers are significant, they do not convey the transformative impact that this program has had on the lives of my students. There are many stories to tell and each is as compelling as the next. But to give just one example, I worked with a student who had left Coppin for a number of years to work. When he returned, he had gained a new seriousness and drive and was committed to earning an MBA. He enrolled in the GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test) prep workshops that I conduct in The Institute for Standardized Testing at Coppin. When he started to look into programs and prepare applications, he was stopped in his tracks at the realization of the impossibility of paying, or borrowing through student loans, the

tuition for business school. I mentioned that some people use law school, rather than an MBA, as the springboard to a career in business and that there is a program through which he could earn a full-ride scholarship to law school. He committed himself fully to preparing for the LSAT and completing the Fannie Angelos Program. His graduation from University of Baltimore School of Law was an emotional event as he was joined on stage by his proud grandfather who had spent his career as a custodian in the University of Baltimore law school. The impact of the transformation, across just two generations, was felt by everyone in attendance.

There are many more stories I can relate about the students with whom I have worked, and of the deep personal impact on their lives and the consequential changes in their career trajectories due to the opportunities afforded by the Fannie Angelos Program. The people of the State of Maryland will be well served by increasing the commitment of financial support for the Fannie Angelos Program at the University of Baltimore School of Law. I urge the committee's favorable report of SB 526.

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