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## **POSITION ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

**BILL: SB 904 - Maryland Higher Education Commission - Formerly Incarcerated Youth Grant Program - Established**

**FROM: Maryland Office of the Public Defender**

**POSITION: Favorable**

**DATE: 03/10/2022**

The Maryland Office of the Public Defender requests that this Committee issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 904.

My name is MarTaze Gaines and I am the Project Coordinator of 24 and None in the Maryland Office of the Public Defender (OPD). I urge a favorable report on SB 904, which would establish a grant program for formerly incarcerated Maryland youth. If passed, State funds would match any Pell grants (up to \$3,000) awarded to eligible persons.

24 and None is an organization for young people with involvement in the Juvenile Legal System to learn about empowerment for the individual, our community, and skills to assist in community building. Though I am approaching two years in this role, most of my work in the past decade has been with people navigating life after release, including my own peers. The barriers that our community faces as they return home are almost innumerable. It is our duty to **do more** especially as we shed more light on the truths that our Juvenile Legal System compounds the negative outcomes that our world attributes to those of marginalized identities, especially Black and Brown people, girls, women, and femmes, and queer people across the spectrum.

With this legislation, we are able to reduce barriers by providing more support to young people trying to change their lives. At 24 and None, we will continue our support of young people in their endeavors to change the world, including through higher education. Money is not the sole solution for our communities' needs but this bill will support the reduction of economic barriers to those things like education that should be treated as rights, not as privileges.

For these reasons, we at 24 and None urge this Committee to issue a favorable report for Senate Bill 904.

**Submitted By: Maryland Office of the Public Defender, Juvenile Division**

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