



*Advocates for Children and Youth is a statewide non-profit focused on improving the lives and experiences of Maryland's children through policy change and program improvement. We champion solutions to child welfare, education, health, and juvenile justice issues, positioning us to influence the full spectrum of youth experiences. This multi-issue platform helps us to improve the entirety of children's worlds—the systems they touch, the people they interact with, and the environment where they live.*

## **House Bill 400- Higher Education - Tuition Waivers for Foster Care Recipients and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth - Modifications**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 400 – Foster Care Recipients – Waiver of Tuition and Other Charges. Advocates for Children and Youth (ACY) supports this bill.

The tuition waiver is an essential tool for ensuring that Maryland's most vulnerable youth can successfully pursue a postsecondary education. According to national and multistate studies, only half of young people in foster care complete high school by age 18.<sup>1</sup> While 84% of 17- and 18-year-old foster youth report wanting to go to college, only 20% of those who graduate from high school attend college and only 2-9% actually earn their bachelor's degree.<sup>2</sup>

The goal of the Maryland's tuition waiver is to alleviate some of the financial barriers for foster youth and unaccompanied homeless youth attending college. However, the eligibility guidelines are making many youth that the waiver is intended to include ineligible. The technical changes to the tuition waiver statute included in House Bill 400 will remedy that problem. Currently, tuition waiver recipients must file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by March 1<sup>st</sup> each year to utilize this waiver. For many unaccompanied homeless youth, they might not even be homeless on the March 1<sup>st</sup> before they want to begin attending school, especially if they are beginning in the Spring semester, since that would mean an entire year earlier.

HB 400 will also expand the tuition waiver to cover youth who receive their high school diploma or GED after aging out of the foster care system. Youth in foster care face a myriad of challenges that impact their ability to meet their educational goals while in care. National studies have shown that twice as many foster youth have repeated a grade, changed schools, or enrolled in special education as compared to

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<sup>1</sup> Fostering Success in Education: National Factsheet on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Foster Care, located at <http://www.fostercareandeducation.org/OurWork/NationalWorkingGroup.aspx> at p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Id. at p. 1.

their peers.<sup>8</sup> While only 50% of foster youth graduate high school by age 18, 80% of foster youth obtain their high school diploma or GED by age 26.<sup>9</sup> Currently a foster youth has to receive her high school diploma or GED while she is still in care (before she turns 21), but HB 400 will ensure that a greater number of foster youth are able to utilize the tuition waiver and pursue a higher education.

The tuition waiver is currently excluding Maryland foster youth who turn 18 while living in out-of-state placements. The changes in HB 400 will remedy this problem. Given Maryland's small geographic size, and numerous bordering states, it is not uncommon for children to be placed outside of the state. Data from 2014, reflects that 160 youth in Maryland's foster care system were living in out of state placements.<sup>10</sup> The majority of these youth were placed with family members, foster homes, adoptive homes, or their own homes.<sup>11</sup> There are also times when there are no placements within Maryland to meet a foster youth's needs. These foster youth are placed by their Local Department of Social Services in out-of-state placements, primarily group home placements, residential treatment centers and JobCorps.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to implementing the technical changes to ensure a greater number of youth are able to utilize the waiver, HB 400 will also require the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to issue yearly reports that will illuminate the impact of the tuition waiver. These reports will include both the number of youth utilizing the waiver and the number of tuition waiver recipients that actually attain degrees. Access to this information is vital for us to be able to gauge the impact of the waiver and to ensure that it is an effective way to assist vulnerable youth in achieving their higher education goals.

**Advocates for Children and Youth urges this committee to issue a favorable report on HB 400, to ensure that homeless youth and foster youth in Maryland have access to higher education opportunities.**

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<sup>8</sup> Government Accountability Office (GAO) (2004). Foster youth: HHS actions could improve coordination of services and monitoring of states' independent living programs. (GAO-05-25.) Washington, DC, p. 6

<sup>9</sup> Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at age 26". Chicago, IL: Chaplin Hall at University of Chicago, pp. 104-106

<sup>10</sup> FY2014 State of Maryland Out-of-Home Placement and Family Preservation Resource Plan, <https://goc.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/8/2013/11/2014-OOHP-Report-Final.pdf> p.26

<sup>11</sup> Id. at p. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Id. at p. 30.