

Support with Amendments**House Ways and Means Committee****Senate Bill 317 – Higher Education Degree & Job Certification Without Debt
Act of 2018****Tina Bjarekull**

March 22, 2018

Senate Bill 317 requires the Governor to provide \$30 million in the State's fiscal 2020 operating budget and each year thereafter to fund the Maryland Community College Promise Program. Under the Program, a student may apply to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to receive a State grant to pay for the cost of tuition at a Maryland Community College. To be eligible to participate in the Program, a student must be eligible for in-county tuition at a Maryland community college, enroll full time, and meet certain income requirements. The income and eligibility requirements vary for students who enroll in associate-degree granting programs versus students who enroll in certificate programs.

The Promise grant is awarded after all other State and federal grants are awarded and must be used to cover the costs of tuition only and may not be used for fees, books, or other costs of attending college. MHEC must award Promise grants to students on a first-come, first-served basis.

While MICUA is not opposed to the Community College Promise Program, we are disappointed the legislation fails to target more State aid to Maryland students demonstrating the most financial need. As originally introduced, the legislation increased the maximum grant available to economically disadvantaged students through the State's Education Excellent Award (EEA) Program. In addition, the legislation required the Governor to provide additional funds for need-based student aid in fiscal 2020 and each year thereafter. These provisions have been stripped from the bill.

Last year, 17,860 students who qualified for a State EEA award did not receive any need-based student aid from the State of Maryland, because the program was underfunded. The expected family contribution (EFC) cutoff for the program in fiscal 2018 was \$2,815. To put that into context, students with an EFC of \$5,600 received a federal Pell Grant award. More must be done to provide additional financial aid to Maryland students who demonstrate financial need.

Senate Bill 317 also creates a Near-Completer Grant Program to provide grants to students who re-enroll at public institutions. Maryland's independent colleges and universities currently participate in the State's existing Near-Completer Program. MICUA is requesting an amendment to allow students who attend a MICUA member institution to participate in the Near Completer

Grant Program established in Senate Bill 317. (A copy of MICUA's proposed amendment is provided at the end of this testimony.)

A student who re-enrolls in college to finish a degree may elect to enroll at a MICUA institution for numerous reasons. The MICUA institution may offer more credits for past academic work, may offer a program in a unique area of study, may be located closer to the student's home or work, or the student may not have been admitted to a public university with a similar program. For whatever reason, students are best served when they have choice and opportunity to attend any Maryland institution that meets their academic, career, and personal needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on Senate Bill 317.

Amendments to Senate Bill 317 - Third Reader

On page 4, in line 1, after "public" insert "AND PRIVATE, NONPROFIT".

On page 5, in line 21, strike "OR", and in line 24 strike "CHARGE." and insert "CHARGE; OR

(III) FOR A NEAR COMPLETER WHO RE-ENROLLS IN A PRIVATE, NONPROFIT INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION THAT IS CHARTERED IN THE STATE OF MARYLAND OR POSSESSES A CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL FROM THE COMMISSION THE LESSER OF:

1. ONE-THIRD OF THE RESIDENT UNDERGRADUATE TUITION CHARGE AT A SENIOR PUBLIC INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF MARYLAND, OTHER THAN THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, BALTIMORE, OR
2. ONE-THIRD OF THE RESIDENT UNDERGRADUTE TUITION CHARGE AT THE PRIVATE, NONPROFIT INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION