



Testimony for House Ways and Means Committee

March 8, 2018

HB 1536 Higher Education – Tuition Rates – Exemptions

FAVORABLE

The ACLU of Maryland supports HB 1536, which would allow more individuals to qualify for in-state tuition under the Maryland Dream Act that was passed by referendum in 2012. Specifically, it removes barriers to receiving in-state tuition such as requiring attendance at a community college, applying to post-secondary school within four years of graduating high school (or equivalent), and requiring the filing of a Maryland tax return. Finally, it provides protections for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”) recipients who did not qualify for Maryland Dream funding, but may need alternative sources of funding to continue their education due to the uncertainty of the DACA program at the federal level.

The Maryland Dream Act has been pivotal to undocumented students’ access to an education past high school. It has empowered young inspirational individuals to pursue their dreams and enter the Maryland workforce prepared for whatever they may face. Ms. Pratishta Khanna was one such individual. She is a third generation Dreamer—a DACA recipient who inherited from her grandmother the drive to become a physician. Her grandmother and father faced socioeconomic barriers that prevented them from attending medical school, but passed that dream to Pratishta. Pratishta was part of the first group to qualify for in-state tuition under the newly passed Maryland Dream Act, after having graduated from Howard Community College. She enrolled at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (“UMBC”), and went on to work at Johns Hopkins University Hospital as a clinical technician in the intensive care unit, and part-time as a medical scribe for the emergency department. She is currently studying for the Medical College Admission Test (“MCAT”) so she can become a doctor. She is also a community leader and has fought for the rights of other undocumented people in Maryland to realize their dreams. The Maryland Dream Act empowered Pratishta to pursue her dream and her family’s dream, and is the embodiment of how successful the DREAM Act truly is. With HB 1536, more people may benefit from in-state tuition, and become the next generation of doctors, entrepreneurs, and community leaders.

HB 1536 will also protect DACA recipients whose legal status is in limbo since the program’s rescission on September 5, 2017. Although there are currently two court-ordered preliminary injunctions that are preventing the program’s complete termination, without a permanent solution in the U.S. Congress, current DACA recipients in postsecondary education in Maryland risk losing the

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funding they need to stay in school. HB 1536 will ensure that even if protections for DACA recipients are not granted in Congress, they will still be able to continue their education and their lives as productive Maryland residents.

HB 1536 will expand the available pool of individuals who will be able to receive in-state tuition, and empower them to have the opportunity to go to postsecondary school and do great things after graduation. Giving Maryland students the ability to pursue their DREAMs should not depend on their immigration status or be limited by where they were born.

For the foregoing reasons, the ACLU of Maryland urges a favorable report on HB 1536.

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