



Testimony to Michigan House Appropriations Committee

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Good afternoon, Chair Witwer, Vice Chairs O’Neal and Lightner and members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bills 350 and 555. I’m Ryan Fewins-Bliss, executive director for Michigan College Access Network (or MCAN), a statewide nonprofit organization headquartered here in Lansing working to get more students into and through college in support of the State’s Sixty by 30 goal. We prioritize students of color, first-generation college-going students, and low-income students who face significant systemic barriers to college enrollment, persistence, and completion as the pathway to that goal.

Through bipartisan legislation passed in 2008, our state had the foresight to create place-based scholarship geographies called Promise Zones. Michigan was the first in the nation to encourage the creation of local Promise programs through state policy. Since 2009, Michigan lawmakers have revised the law several times to strengthen the legislation. Each Promise Zone is committed to ensuring that every child living and attending school in that community has a tuition-free path to at least an associate degree. These communities are working to deliver this promise through private donations, and by “capturing” growth in state education tax through tax increment financing.

Through the current law, Michigan’s Promise Zone communities have been supporting students’ tuition and fees. MCAN applauds the changes outlined in Senate Bill 350, allowing Zones to better set their own design for what costs their scholarships will cover. The bill will allow Promise Zones to provide financial support to cover a student’s additional Cost of Attendance, a federal term that includes housing, food, transportation, and childcare. The bill does not require Promise Zone Authorities to expand their support. Instead, it provides the 15 Authorities the flexibility and choice to include additional financial support to students as fits their individual design. Funds will come from current and future tax capture that is already being allocated to the Promise Zone and there will be no cost to the State.

With the generous increase in state-based financial aid the legislature and the governor have implemented in the last several years, the need to cover tuition and fees is less burdensome on the Promise Zones. This legislation lets us maximize the state investment in tuition by investing more local funds in total Cost of Attendance, making student success even more likely.

It’s clear that covering a student’s tuition costs are not enough to get them across the graduation stage. Recent research tells us that 42 percent of community college students indicated they had been food insecure in the last 30 days, 46 percent reported experiencing housing insecurity in the last year, and 30 percent were parents themselves with childcare as a large expense they struggle to pay. We also know that full-time community college students spend almost \$2,000 a year on transportation. College enrollment is not enough to get the additional certificates and degrees Michigan’s economy needs. College completion must be the real goal.

The Promise Zone philosophy is simple: invest local taxes on local students to attend local colleges to meet the talent needs of local employers and bolster the local and statewide economy. The Promise Zone legislation was good policy when your predecessors created it; it will be great policy with these changes.

MCAN also supports Senate Bill 555, sponsored by Senator Anthony. I think you'll agree the language is straightforward and the bill is common sense. We want local leaders who have a vested interest as well as applicable expertise to govern these Promise Zone Authorities.

Thank you. I'm happy to take any questions you may have.