



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

CHRISTINA HENDERSON
Councilmember, At-Large
Chairperson, Committee on Health

Committee Member
Hospital and Health Equity
Judiciary and Public Safety
Transportation and the Environment

Statement of Introduction
Universal Free Application for Federal Student Aid Graduation Requirement Act of 2023
September 26, 2023

Today, I am proud to introduce the Universal Free Application for Federal Student Aid Graduation Requirement Act of 2023 along with Councilmembers Charles Allen, Kenyan R. McDuffie, Vincent C. Gray, Brooke Pinto, Matthew Frumin, and Robert C. White, Jr. This legislation would require that each District of Columbia public high school student file a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) with the United States Department of Education as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma. Students and families would have the option to opt-out of this requirement by completing a waiver form administered by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

Each year, the Department of Education awards approximately \$112 billion in grant, work-study, and loan funds, making it the largest provider of student financial aid in the nation. Students must submit a FAFSA application to access that financial assistance. Due to a variety of factors such as the pandemic, weak wage growth, and decades of rising college costs, financing higher education out of pocket has become more economically challenging than ever before.¹

This current landscape makes financial aid an incredibly important factor in encouraging post-secondary enrollment and reducing the burden of student loan debt, yet the National College Attainment Network found that the national class of 2022 left \$3.58 billion on the table in Pell Grants because of a decreasing rate of FAFSA completion.² Despite having one of the highest FAFSA completion rates in the nation, so few students in the District’s graduating class of 2022 applied for student aid that \$2.7 million in Pell Grants was left on the table.³

In response to low FAFSA completion rates, multiple states adopted policies to ensure that students are aware of and maximize the financial aid available to them. Currently, 12 states have universal FAFSA in some form or another while at least another dozen have introduced legislation advancing the policy in the last couple of years.⁴ Louisiana was the first state to adopt

¹ [Should States Make the FAFSA Mandatory?](#)

² [NCAN Report: In 2022, High School Seniors Left \\$3.58 Billion on the Table in Pell Grants](#)

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ [Four More States Adopt Universal FAFSA; Total Climbs to 12](#)



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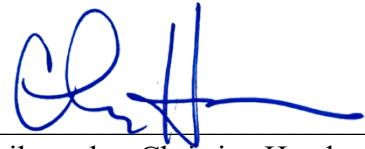
these policies in school year 2017-18, and has seen increases in FAFSA filing rates, high school graduation, and in postsecondary enrollment. Additionally, the policy has helped address equity concerns with the FAFSA completion gap separating high-income districts from low-income districts closing from 8.5 percentage points to 1.1 percentage points in just one year.⁵ Other states have begun to see similar results after implementing universal FAFSA legislation and the District should follow suit.

I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Council and ensuring that the District's students have what they need to be able to take full advantage of the aid available to them as they enroll in post-secondary institutions following high school graduation.

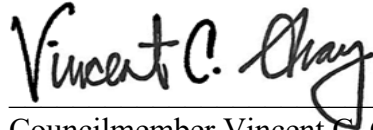
⁵ [Opportunities & Challenges of Universal FAFSA](#)

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2 Councilmember Charles Allen



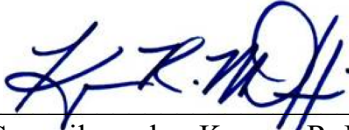
Councilmember Christina Henderson

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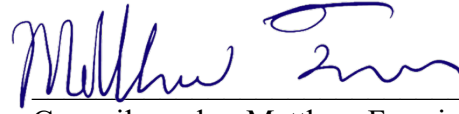
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6 Councilmember Vincent C. Gray



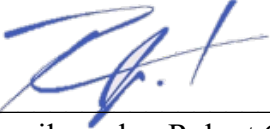
Councilmember Brooke Pinto

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10 Councilmember Kenyan R. McDuffie



Councilmember Matthew Frumin

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14 Councilmember Robert C. White, Jr.

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20 A BILL

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25 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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30 To amend the Raising the Expectations for Education Outcomes Omnibus Act of 2012 to require
31 that each public high school student file a free application for Federal Student Aid with
32 the United States Department of Education as a prerequisite to receiving a high school
33 diploma.

34
35 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
36 act may be cited as the “Universal Free Application for Federal Student Aid Graduation
37 Requirement Act of 2023”.

38 Sec. 2. Section 203 of the Raising the Expectations for Education Outcomes Omnibus
39 Act of 2012, effective June 19, 2012 (D.C. Law 19-142; D.C. Official Code § 38-752.03), is
40 amended as follows:

41 (a) A new subsection (a-1) is added to read as follows:

42 “(a-1) Beginning with the graduating class of 2024, the Mayor shall ensure that each
43 public high school student submits one of the following to the student’s high school before
44 graduation:

45 “(1) Proof of submission of a Free Application for Federal Student Aid
46 (“FAFSA”) application with the United States Department of Education; or

47 “(B) The waiver created by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education
48 pursuant to subsection (e) of this section.”.

49 (b) Subsection (b) is amended to read as follows:

50 “(b) By September 30th of each calendar year, the Mayor shall submit a report to the
51 Council that details the number of students who:

52 “(1) Applied for FAFSA;

53 “(2) Filed the FAFSA waiver; and

54 “(3) Enrolled at a post-secondary institution, including the number of students
55 who attend each type, including:

56 “(A) Universities;

57 “(B) Colleges;

58 “(C) Vocational schools; and

59 “(D) Other post-secondary institutions.”.

60 (c) A new subsection (e) is added to read as follows:

61 “(e) The Office of the State Superintendent of Education shall create a waiver form that
62 exempts a student from submitting a FAFSA application as a prerequisite to graduation.”.

63 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

64 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
65 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
66 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a)

67 Sec. 4. Effective date.

68 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the
69 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of Congressional review as
70 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December
71 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of
72 Columbia Register.