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**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 543:
Maryland Fair Access to Education Act of 2017**

TO: Chair Carter and Members of the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
FROM: Jonathon Rondeau, President & CEO, Family League of Baltimore
DATE: February 15, 2017

As Baltimore’s Local Management Board, Family League serves as an architect of change in Baltimore by promoting data-driven, collaborative initiatives and aligning resources to create lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. Our mission is that by 2030, all children in Baltimore will be born healthy, succeed in school, graduate high school and transition into higher education and the workforce.

We support the Maryland Fair Access to Education Act on the grounds that it contributes to a more level playing field for any Baltimore youth seeking access to higher education, regardless of prior history. This legislation aligns with our role as a lead facilitating partner for the Community Schools strategy in Baltimore, which brings schools and resource providers together to identify and reduce barriers to student success—including pathways to graduate from high school and pursue further education.

Furthermore, Family League’s strategy to improve the outcomes for Opportunity Youth (youth not in school or currently employed) builds on extensive efforts in Baltimore. The Baltimore Workforce Investment Board’s Youth Council, for example, works on youth strategic planning and system building, advocacy, program planning and development, resource mapping, youth opportunity implementation, and collaborates with Baltimore City Public Schools in the promotion and development of school-to-career linkages.¹ Family League has worked closely with the Investment Board’s Youth Council in founding the Baltimore City Opportunity Youth Collaborative, now known as the CONNECT, “a cross-sector collaborative of government agencies, service providers, educational institutions, employers, and nonprofits engaged in a collective impact effort to connect or reconnect Baltimore’s opportunity youth to the economic life of Baltimore by creating and enhancing pathways into post-secondary education, credentialing, and careers leading to family-supporting wages.”²

¹ Baltimore City Workforce Investment Board. (2016). <http://www.baltoworkforce.com/committees.htm>.

² Field Guide Consulting. (2016). *Connecting Baltimore’s Opportunity Youth to Careers*. A report for the Job Opportunities Task Force and Baltimore’s Promise. Page 11. <http://www.baltimorespromise.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Connecting-Baltimore-Opportunity-Youth-to-Careers.pdf>

Although Baltimore City's juvenile arrest rate has declined, from 74.5/1,000 youth ages 10-17 in 2013 to 46.7 in 2015,³ it remains alarmingly high and has implications for education. For example, 147 of the youth involved in the juvenile justice system are also enrolled in community high schools.⁴ The unique needs of this population are addressed in recommendations put forth by the Baltimore City Youth Health and Wellness Strategy, a cross-sector city-wide effort to "make sure all young people ages 6-19 have equal opportunities to connect with the people and services they need to be healthy and successful."⁵

Any college applicant meeting the minimum requirements as set forth by the college or university should not be disqualified on the basis of criminal history alone. By removing the question from college applications, more qualified individuals will have a chance to obtain the education needed to help advance their respective socio-economic stations in life.

Family League of Baltimore respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 543. If you have any questions, I can be reached at jrondeau@familyleague.org or 420-662-5500.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Rondeau
President & CEO
Family League of Baltimore

³ Baltimore Police Department and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2016).

⁴ Maryland Department of Juvenile Services. (2016).

⁵ Baltimore City Youth Health and Wellness Strategy. (2016). *Strategy Background and Rationale*. <http://www.baltimoreyouthhealthandwellness.com/#!/about/vj035>