



# Highlands High School

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Dear Scholarship Committee,

It is my distinct honor to write a letter of recommendation in support of Marissa Callender's scholarship application. Marissa is by far one of the top students that I have encountered in the duration of 12-year career as a school counselor. Marissa is a student who is truly invested in making a difference in her community. In addition to that, Marissa has faced adversity and overcome it with unique grace and eloquence.

Approximately, halfway through her junior year Marissa's father unexpectedly passed away due to a cardiac irregularity. Marissa's grades did not falter and in fact they improved. In talking with Marissa about this she realized that her father's death meant a significant loss of income for her family that she would have to rely in scholarships in order to attend a prestigious university. Therefore, she worked even harder while dealing with the new reality of her life.

Additionally, Marissa took on the role of the second parent in her home, by choice. She has been diligently committed to making sure that her four younger siblings have a childhood that is comparable to her own. Marissa has made herself available to drive her younger siblings to their activities. She worked extra hours at her part time job during the holiday season to make sure that her siblings had Christmas gifts. She also made sure that she kept up with her father's tradition of hiding the "Elf on the Shelf," every night for her youngest brother.

While Marissa has persevered despite adversity she has also suffered. I have witnessed her in emotional pain and very much appropriately grieving the loss of her father. She has accessed support within the school community. Marissa has very good relationships with her teachers and school staff. In addition, I can say that Marissa has taken the appropriate steps to process her grief.

As a result of the school and community support that Marissa experienced, she pursued her own philanthropic efforts, by establishing a toy drive to benefit needy students in the Highlands School District. She collected gifts for hundreds of students and facilitated the distribution. Her passion in life truly lies with helping others and making a difference in the lives of children in need. For this reason, I feel that Marissa should be considered for the highest scholarship your institution can offer. She will maximize any opportunity extended to her. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions or concerns about Marissa Callender.

Sincerely,

Susie Gurrera, PhD

School Counselor, Highlands High School