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**Bill Number:** Senate Bill 501

**Position:** Letter of Information

**Title:** Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures - Alterations

**Committee:** Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

**Hearing Date:** March 2, 2022

**Bill Summary:**

Senate Bill 501 requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to follow certain procedures for each open meeting of the Commission. It also requires the Office of Student Financial Assistance within the Commission, to notify each student of the Office's decision regarding the student's application for a Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award on or before April 15 of each year.

**Information:**

Currently, meeting minutes of the Maryland Higher Education Commission are posted following each public meeting and most recently, video recordings of the Commission meetings are posted on the MHEC website. As we progress into 2022, along with the existing written meeting minutes, audio recordings, along with images available of any PowerPoint presentations, will be added to past meeting webpages for public review.

Regarding the Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Assistance Award program, applicants must complete either the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Maryland State Financial Aid Application (MSFAA) by the state deadline of March 1 to be considered for the Educational Assistance (EA) Grant and Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant. MHEC identifies applicants potentially eligible for the GA Grant award, using the income information reported on the FAFSA/MSFAA. A GA Grant applicant whose income is within the income requirements must also submit certain documentation by the established deadline to MHEC for further consideration of the award. Initial applicants have until April 1 to submit the required documentation for priority consideration of the GA Grant. No supporting documentation is required for the EA Grant.

Since the deadline to submit documentation for the GA Grant is April 1, MHEC finalizes the review of all GA Grant applicants within three weeks of the priority deadline to perform initial awarding by May 1. Pursuant to §18-307(c) of the Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland, MHEC must also perform initial awarding in the EA Program by May 1.

MHEC has explored the option to process awards in the EA Grant program separate from the GA Grant program in an effort to perform EA Grant awarding earlier. However, this option is not possible given that both programs share one funding source. In accordance with statute and regulations GA Grant applicants are prioritized over EA Grant applicants. Therefore, MHEC

must process GA Grant applicants before awarding can be performed in the EA Grant program.

Additionally, MHEC no longer provides award estimates to GA Grant applicants in an effort to provide earlier award notifications. When MHEC provided award estimates in the past, before a student's final award determination was made, it resulted in MHEC canceling the award for students who failed to meet the eligibility requirements after they had committed to an institution. The cancellation of the award resulted in students having remaining balances at the institutions. Moreover, under the current structure of the program, MHEC is unable to perform awarding earlier. MHEC makes every attempt to complete awarding in the program prior to May 1 to provide as much advance notice to applicants prior to the May 1 national decision deadline for the applicant to commit to an institution. During the last award cycle, MHEC performed awarding in the EA program on April 27 and continues to work diligently to further streamline the internal review process for the upcoming year so that awards can be made earlier than last year.

We welcome the opportunity to further discuss the proposed bill and information provided here. Please contact Donna Thomas, Director of the Office of Student Financial Assistance at [donnae.thomas@maryland.gov](mailto:donnae.thomas@maryland.gov), for more information.