

Collegiate Directions Inc SB501 3.2.22.pdf

Uploaded by: Amma Felix

Position: FAV



March 2, 2022

**THE MARYLAND SENATE
EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

SB501 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures – Alterations

**Testimony of Amma Felix
President and CEO, Collegiate Directions, Inc.
Bethesda, Maryland
Also writing on behalf of the Maryland Alliance for College Access and Affordability**

Good afternoon, Senator Paul Pinsky, Chair and Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share written testimony about Senate Bill 501 regarding the alterations to procedures of the Maryland Higher Education Commission introduced by Senators Sarah Elfreth, Paul Pinsky, Jim Rosapepe and Mary Washington.

My name is Amma Felix, president and CEO of Collegiate Directions, Inc. (CDI), a comprehensive nonprofit organization that focuses on college access and completion for low-income, first-generation-to-college high school students in Montgomery County. We are in support of Senate Bill 501 and want to share with you some key points for your further consideration regard timing of award notification.

Setting Aside Funds is Important

The bill proposes setting April 15 as the award notification date for award recipients. We are supportive of the new date, but it only works provided that MHEC Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) can process all the applicants in a timely manner. We need greater infrastructure and more efficient practices to make sure this happens. The new notification date further compresses an already tight timeframe which has its challenges and where there are too many opportunities for low-income students to get caught in the administrative bureaucracy.

To prevent more students from falling through the cracks, we ask that for every Guaranteed Access (GA) Grant student in the process who is eligible, meets the criteria and submits by the MHEC deadline but is not awarded there should be funds held in reserve so that the proposed change in award date does not penalize any new applicants or renewals.

There must also be other ways to make the verification process more efficient including partnering with other state agencies (ex., the Office of the Comptroller to verify income) to ensure that this proposed April 15 deadline can be met.

Thank you for your time.

SB501_USM_FAV_Boughman.pdf

Uploaded by: Andy Clark

Position: FAV



SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Senate Bill 501
Maryland Higher Education Commission - Procedures – Alterations
March 2, 2022
Joann Boughman, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs
Favorable

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts on Senate Bill 501. The bill requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to be made available to the public through live video streaming. The bill also requires the Office of Student Financial Assistance, on or before April 15 each year, to notify each student of the Office's decision regarding the student's application for a Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award. The University System of Maryland (USM) believes that these changes will benefit higher education and students throughout Maryland.

Each year thousands of Marylander high school seniors and their families go through the process of deciding where to attend college before the May 1st enrollment confirmation deadline. The type and amount of financial aid offered before the enrollment confirmation deadline play a significant role in deciding where to attend college. Students with high financial need and who are eligible for the need-based Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award are asked to make enrollment decisions without the full knowledge of financial aid funding available to them or with very little time to consider this complex matter. Some eligible students who are notified regarding their Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award after the May 1 enrollment confirmation deadline may not even enroll in college at all. For our eligible Maryland high school students, notification regarding their eligibility for the Award and the amount awarded by April 15 each year will help students and their families make an informed decision on where to attend college. For some eligible students with high financial need, the early notification will provide a full understanding of financial resources available to help them decide to enroll and where to enroll.

Second, it is important for all state agencies and entities to provide transparency and open government when conducting meetings, which includes posting recordings of meetings online. It is essential that recordings of MHEC's meetings are available to all higher education stakeholders. The University System Board of Regents must live stream and archive their meeting recordings on the website. We believe it makes sense for MHEC to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration on Senate Bill 501 and we request a favorable report.



About the University System of Maryland

The University System of Maryland (USM)—one system made up of 12 institutions, three regional centers, and a central office—awards 8 out of every 10 bachelor’s degrees in the State of Maryland. The USM is governed by a Board of Regents, comprised of 21 members from diverse professional and personal backgrounds. The chancellor, Dr. Jay Perman, oversees and manages the operations of USM. However, each constituent institution is run by its own president who has authority over that university. Each of USM’s 12 institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes Historically Black Colleges and Universities, comprehensive institutions, research universities, and the country’s largest public online institution.

SB 501_MACC_FAV_B.Phillips.pdf

Uploaded by: Brad Phillips

Position: FAV



SENATE EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Testimony by

Dr. Brad Phillips, Executive Director

March 2, 2022

SB 501 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures - Alterations

POSITION: Support

The Maryland Association of Community Colleges, representing Maryland's 16 public two-year institutions of postsecondary education, offer our support for SB 501 that will expedite the award process for recipients of the Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Awards. Enactment of this legislation will also permit recipients of the Maryland Community College Promise Program to receive awards earlier.

The need to get award notifications to students in time to make decisions about their future is imperative for hundreds of students who must rely on financial aid to attend college. Students out of high school from low-income families are particularly vulnerable to the cost of college. If financial aid remains in question while decisions are being made by high school graduates about their future, students are likely to delay further training, placing them in unskilled jobs that will not pay a living wage. Timing is important for students making choices about their future. To notify students of financial aid after enrollment deadlines is inexcusable.

MACC supports this legislation and thanks Senators Elfreth, Pinsky, Rosapepe, and Washington for bringing this matter to the attention of the Committee. We urge a favorably report for SB 501 that will expedite the awarding process for recipients of the Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award and consequently allow recipients of the Maryland Community College Promise Program to be awarded in a more timely manner.

SB501_FAVORABLE_MOST.pdf

Uploaded by: Ellie Mitchell

Position: FAV

SB 501–Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures – Alterations – FAVORABLE**Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee****March 2, 2022**

The Maryland Out of School Time Network (MOST) is a statewide organization dedicated to closing opportunity gaps by expanding both the quantity and quality of afterschool and summer learning opportunities for school-aged young people. MOST is one of the fifty statewide networks supported by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and serves as Maryland’s affiliate to the National Afterschool Association. MOST has a strong focus on College and Career Readiness – offering a comprehensive toolkit and training for afterschool and summer program providers.

The provisions outlined in House Bill 1030 represent clear steps towards making the Maryland Higher Education Commission a more transparent, fair, and equitable organization. By using digital tools that have become so commonplace in other institutions across the state government, the commission can develop greater public trust and a sense of accountability. Furthermore, the notion of providing students with clear feedback regarding the status of their scholarship is not merely an act of courtesy, but also an important contribution to families’ decision-making processes.

In 2022, it seems only natural to take advantage of the relevant communications functions that the internet has to offer. Video streaming demonstrates just one of the many ways that technology can aid democratic processes by providing private citizens and media personnel greater latitude can carry out their intrinsic watchdog functions. Additionally, the proposal to log meetings for posterity would the MHEC to be a more effective learning institution— one that is more aware of its procedural bottlenecks and idiosyncrasies.

This is to say nothing of the Delegate Howard P Rawlings Educational Award, which has long recognized the academic achievements of students that demonstrate both educational excellence and financial need. With respect to House Bill 1030, the proposed alterations would further improve the transparency of the MHEC’s scholarship program by making the nature of their financial award clear to applicants. Though seemingly minor, these changes stand to improve the commission’s legitimacy in the eyes of the public. As an organization with demonstrable commitments to expanding career and college readiness initiatives across the state, MOST Network strongly expresses its support for the bill under consideration and urges the committee provide a favorable report.

Ellie Mitchell
Director, Maryland Out of School Time Network
emitchell@mostnetwork.org
410-370-7498

Gerson Vasquez -SB 501 testimony 3-2-22 .pdf

Uploaded by: Gerson Vasquez

Position: FAV

March 2, 2022

Good afternoon, my name is Gerson Vasquez. I was born in El Salvador. I came to America by myself, when I was 16-years-old. I am writing to support SB 501.

For my senior year of high school, I was living at my aunt's house and with friends from church. In about 2 years I will get my green card, but right now I am still undocumented and this has made it hard to get financial aid.

I learned about college, MHEC [**M-HACK**], and the MSFAA [**Miss - Fuh**] from people at CASA. I was happy to learn that I might get money for college but as we started the process I saw my opportunity close before my eyes.

Why? They were asking me for three years of taxes from my legal guardian but unfortunately, my aunt was not really my legal guardian.

Then there was a second option – I had to present three years of taxes done by me. But why would a kid like me have three years of taxes?

But this didn't stop me. I filed three years of “back taxes.” Then I had to get a document to show that I was “homeless” from my high school.

The English in the MSFAA [**Miss - Fuh**] was also complicated – and that is why I had to get help from many people.

Thankfully, I got the Guaranteed Access grant for my first two years of college, and now I have a 3.0 GPA at Montgomery College. But I know so many classmates who were just like me who don't have this opportunity because they don't know how to do the paperwork.

We need to make a process that is easy for those students who are in the same place as I was two years ago. I wish more undocumented students could have the same opportunity as me and I hope that you can change the regulations to make this process easy for us. This is why I am in support of SB 501

Thank you,

Gerson Vasquez.

Written Testimony SB 501.pdf

Uploaded by: Jennifer Covahey

Position: FAV

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL
AFFAIRS
MARCH 2, 2022
SB501**

My name is Jennifer Covahey, I am the Director of College Success at the CollegeBound Foundation in Baltimore City and an alumna of the program. For over 30 years CollegeBound has helped Baltimore City public school students, like myself, navigate the path to and through college.

I write in support of SB 501. Currently, MHEC notifies all Delegate Rawlings awardees by May 1st. These awards range from \$3,000 to \$19,300 with Maryland private colleges matching the \$19,300 grant, totaling \$38,600 for private colleges. It would be extremely beneficial to students to change the notification date to April 15 for two reasons: (1) first, the date change would help our students make the best financial decision because May 1 – the current notification date -- is also national college decision day, the date by which students must commit to a college. Learning about the Delegate Rawlings award on the same day as decision day does not allow students enough time to compare their full financial aid packages between Maryland public and private colleges. (2) second, May 1 is when most colleges require students to pay enrollment and housing deposits which can be burdensome for families with limited financial means. But if a student wins the Rawlings Guaranteed Access Grant, the student can request the fees to be waived. Currently with the May 1st – deadline, students learn of their award and have to request a waiver the same day, which isn't enough time for colleges to approve. Therefore, a student may miss out on their top college choice and housing. Moving the date to April 15 will allow families additional time to request a waiver for enrollment and housing deposits.

For these two reasons, I ask that you vote in favor of Senate Bill 501 to move up the Delegate Rawlings notification date by two weeks to April 15th.

If there are any questions I can be reached at jcovahey@collegeboundfoundation.org or 410-262-4372. Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you.

Jennifer Covahey
Director of College Success
The CollegeBound Foundation

3-2-2022 - SB501 – Maryland Higher Education Commi

Uploaded by: Justin Hayes

Position: FAV



Peter Franchot
Comptroller

TESTIMONY OF COMPTROLLER PETER FRANCHOT

Support – Senate Bill 501 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures – Alterations

Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

March 2, 2022

Chairman Pinsky, Vice Chairman Kagan and members of the Committee, it is my pleasure to provide testimony in **support** of **Senate Bill 501 – Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures – Alterations**. I would like to thank Senators Sarah Elfreth, Paul Pinsky, Jim Rosapepe, and Mary Washington for sponsoring this important legislation, and the Committee for providing the opportunity for my testimony to be heard.

This legislation will improve the process by which college students – particularly those from lower income households – access state-based educational aid. It has long been a priority of the Comptroller’s Office to modernize antiquated systems within state government, and this is one such opportunity. Our agency stands ready to assist with the improvements envisioned by this legislation that will advance the timing and accuracy of income verification for parents and students, hopefully reducing financial stress ahead of the next phase of their academic careers. This is a long-overdue fix that ought to be welcomed by each of the parties to these transactions.

If passed, SB501 will be a win for Maryland’s educational institutions, parents, and – most importantly – students working hard to advance their skills and contribute to our economy.

For the reasons stated above, I respectfully request a **favorable report** for Senate Bill 501. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Movado Gray Testimony SB 501 3-2022.pdf

Uploaded by: Movado Gray

Position: FAV

March 2, 2022

Greetings to Whom It May Concern,

My Name is Movado Gray a FGCB student. I am writing this letter on behalf of a situation which took place at the end of my sophomore year in 2020 Mid-2021. I resubmitted documentation through the MHEC portal however, I wasn't given an answer on if I will be awarded the grant such as, the amount until late July a month before my actual semester starts in August 2021. Around this time all my school documentation plus COVID and vaccine records must be turned in. Also I stay on campus so my housing registration and paperwork needed to be turned in, but without knowing if I was awarded or not the school paperwork was put on hold until receiving my award. I understand that COVID could've played a huge part in the delay however, I was feeling a sense of "what if's" and a bit of anxiety knowing that if this doesn't go in my favor, I would be in jeopardy this school year with financial aid. As a junior in college that's the last thing anyone wants to think about. I thought if I turned in everything sooner the better. I thought if I turned my documentation on time, shouldn't I receive an answer a bit sooner than a month before my classes start? This is why I am in support of SB 501 so that students like myself will not have to be worried before beginning a new school year, but they can feel confident that they will receive their GA grant in time.

Thank you,

Movado Gray

Peter Iwuh Testimony SB501.pdf

Uploaded by: Peter Iwuh

Position: FAV

March 2, 2022

My name is Peter Iwuh and I am a Senior at Morgan State University.

I am here in support of SB501 which supports the awarding of state grants. I began college in 2018 and since my first year of college, I have been receiving the Guaranteed Access Grant. At the beginning of last semester, I became concerned due to not seeing the GA grant added to my financial aid account.

For years the Guaranteed Access Grant has made it possible for me to attend MSU and stay on campus. I thought this year would be no different until August 2021. During the summer I noticed my GA grant was not awarded. I kept contacting my Financial Aid office and MHEC to see if anything was being done, but I got no response. It wasn't until my classes were about to start at this time that I reached out to FGCB the help as they contacted the President of my college to make sure things were done. Without their support, I would've been unable to begin my senior year. I believe if MHEC could have informed me of this matter I could have done something sooner before the summer or before the school year started.

Thank you,

Peter Iwuh

SB 501 OSFA Educational Excellence Award notificat

Uploaded by: Sara Fidler

Position: FAV

Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
***Senate Bill 501 (Elfreth) Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures -
Alterations***

Sara C. Fidler, President
sfidler@micua.org

March 2, 2022

On behalf of the member institutions of the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA) and the 58,000 students we serve, I thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony in support of [Senate Bill 501 Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures - Alterations](#). This bill requires the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to make Commission meetings available to the public through live video streaming. The bill also requires the MHEC Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) to send a notification no later than April 15th to each student who applied for a Delegate Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Award indicating whether the student is a recipient of an award and, if applicable, the amount awarded to the student.

Many MICUA institutions offer rolling admissions, accepting students to their schools as the applications are received and evaluated, rather than waiting for a specific decision date. Students must apply for the Educational Excellence awards by March 1st and May 1st is the award notification date. May 1st is also National Candidates’ Reply Date, the deadline whereby an applicant formally notifies a college that they will accept its offer of admission. This bill would require award notification to the students no later than April 15th, allowing sufficient time for students to make an informed decision before they commit to a school. Schools also need adequate time to respond to the award decision and modify a financial aid package for a student, if needed. According to the current timeline of the award, often schools learn of the award recipients within one to two days of the May 1st decision date. This does not allow sufficient planning time for students or schools.

Students at all thirteen state-aided MICUA schools are recipients of both Educational Assistance (EA) grants and Guaranteed Access (GA) grants. For the 2021-2022 academic year, over 2800 Educational Excellence awards valued at over \$16 million were awarded to MICUA schools.

EA and GA awards at MICUA schools 2021-2022 academic year*		
Type of Grant	# of awards	Amount of awards (\$)
EA	2224	5,478,600
GA	637	10,952,750
TOTAL	2861	16,431,350

* Source: OSFA

Every one of MICUA's thirteen State-aided institutions also participates in the Guaranteed Access Partnership Program (GAPP). GAPP is a public-private partnership that helps students close the affordability gap in order to attend a private nonprofit institution of higher education in the State. Students who receive a GA Grant from the State are eligible for a matching grant from a MICUA institution. Since 2017 when the program was established, GAPP has matched over \$45 million to nearly 2,400 Maryland students.

The MICUA colleges and universities are committed to helping students obtain the financial assistance they need to access their choice of institution of higher education. We use 85%-90% of our Sellinger funding for financial aid for Maryland students, and in Fiscal 2021, we awarded over \$300 million in institution-based financial aid. We have seen increased financial need in recent years, especially during the pandemic, and this bill will help alleviate some of the stress and uncertainty of the school selection for students.

We appreciate the effort that the sponsors have made to ensuring that students receive and retain the financial aid resources they need to pursue their undergraduate education. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Angela Sherman, Vice President for Academic Affairs, asherman@micua.org.

For all of these reasons, MICUA requests a favorable Committee report for Senate Bill 501.

SB501_Elfreth_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Elfreth

Position: FAV

SENATOR SARAH ELFRETH
Legislative District 30
Anne Arundel County

Budget and Taxation Committee

Subcommittees

Education, Business and Administration

Chair, Pensions

Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Administrative,
Executive, and Legislative Review

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 2, 2022

Testimony in Favor of SB501
Maryland Higher Education Commission - Procedures - Alterations

Chairman Pinsky, Vice-Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,

I respectfully request a favorable report of Senate Bill 501 to start the process of implementing much-needed reforms to the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).

As this Committee is aware, MHEC currently handles various aspects of Maryland's higher education policy and regulation and we are grateful for their dedication to Maryland students and institutions. However, over the course of the interim, I received two separate concerns related to MHEC: one related to the transparency of Commission meeting and the other related to the tight timeline in which MHEC notifies the recipient of financial aid through the Howard P. Rawlings Guaranteed Access Grant (GA) and Educational Assistance (EA) program. SB501 is the result of those ensuing conversations:

On the transparency of Commission meetings, this legislation will simply require that each open meeting of the Commission be made available to the public through live video streaming and require that they make publicly available online archived meetings of the Commission.

This is similar to what this Committee previously required of the Board of Regents in 2019 legislation, and will ensure that all Marylanders and higher education institutions have the ability to view and understand the decisions that are being made about higher education in the State.

On the GA and EA award notification, this legislation will require that these awards be made on or before April 15th each year – rather than the current award date of May 1st (at the earliest).

This date change is critically important because of the timelines that our college students currently face. The current date of May 1st also happens to be the same date as the universal enrollment deadline for higher education institutions across Maryland and the nation – meaning that students likely do not know the full support our State is going to provide when they are making their decision on where to go for a college education. This is one of the most consequential economic decisions of a young person's life.

When our students do not have this information it can lead to:

1. Students being driven away from public MD institutions as they seek private or out of State institutions that can provide more scholarship.
2. Students submitting enrollment contracts (usually hundreds of dollars) at one institution but then enrolling elsewhere once we have provided them their award
3. Students missing out on other opportunities, such as housing, due to late enrollment.

Moving the award notification date up will provide future college students more information to be able to make more financially conscious decisions about their future.

Lastly, this legislation has led to more feedback on the critical matter of financial assistance to our students – and I would like to highlight two key points from those conversations and budget hearings with MHEC. I appreciate the Committee thinking through these larger challenges - I will potentially be bringing to this Committee in the form of an amendment after further conversations.

1. The requirement that MHEC seek financial matching information from the Comptroller's office to expedite the processing of applications; and,
2. The creation, or planning for the creation, of an updated universal scholarship platform in which Maryland students can more easily apply for scholarships.

Once again I respectfully request a favorable report to Senate Bill 501 to implement much-needed reforms to MHEC.

SB501.pdf

Uploaded by: Brianna Callahan

Position: FWA

KIPP:Forward

March 1st, 2022

To members of the Maryland Senate:

I am writing on behalf of KIPP Baltimore to advocate for and support SB 501 outlining changes to the award timeline for the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC).

I have worked in Maryland with college-enrolled students for seven years. In that time our organization has supported hundreds of students who receive funding from MHEC. This program has been instrumental in giving Maryland students access to higher education, while also providing a sustainable financial pathway to graduation.

This funding is critical for students to persist in college to completion and achieve their higher education aspirations. Our organization, KIPP Baltimore, supports the earlier award date of April 15th, but we recommend that this bill requires that all eligible Guaranteed Access Grant (GA) students are awarded, and that funds are held in reserve for GA applicants who submit their verification documents by the current deadline of April 1. *The change in award date should not penalize any GA applicant.* As the program currently stands, the GA and Educational Assistance Grant (EA) are awarded out of the same fund, notifying EA students of their award earlier should not be able to pull funding from GA recipients.

We believe that notifying EA and GA recipients earlier of their award status is critical for students and their families as they consider their best financial fit college. Therefore, KIPP Baltimore supports SB 501 with the inclusion of the amendments listed above.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brianna Callahan', with a stylized, cursive script.

Brianna Callahan, MSW
Manager of Alumni Persistence
KIPP Baltimore

SB501 Testimony H-ED Alterations-Procedures 3-1-22

Uploaded by: Joseph Fisher

Position: FWA

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The Honorable Alexander Williams, Jr.

Judge, United States District Court

March 1, 2022

To Paul Pinsky Senate Chair and State Senators

I am writing on the behalf the First Generation College Bound and a member and Chair of Maryland Alliance for College Affordability and Equity for the passage of SB501 Maryland Higher Education Commission – Procedures – Alterations submitted by Senator Sarah Elfreth. FGCB and members of Maryland Alliance recognize the need of the bill due to years of providing services to students, especially students of poverty with limited resources in schools and communities. While we are supportive of early notification of Financial Aid Awards due to College Decision Day, May 1st, we have concerns. While the bill was written for MHEC to notify students by April 15 or sooner for their financial aid awards, many Guarantee Access students who have applied or renewal will not be awarded. This is due to the time needed for processing required GA documents to be award and especially students who are on hold due to colleges waiting to receive their credits. It is important to note MHEC is unable to confirm renewal awards until mid to late summer due to the reporting of College Credits. All college are not reporting their credits as needed by MHEC. As a result GA students are challenged in registering for class due to late reporting of credits for MHEC to release the funds on time.

If All funds are to be dispersed before or by April 15th, many newly award and renewal GA students still being process will be wait listed or not funded. Recognizing this need I am requesting that funds be set aside for students who are still being processed and for students who are being renewed for the GA. As a result we are request that language in the bill be amended to reflect this need.

Sincerely,

Joseph A. Fisher
CEO & Founder

8101 Sandy Spring Road, Suite 230, Laurel, MD 20707

Office 301-490-0911 ♦ Fax 866-811-0130

www.fgcb.org

SB501 MHEC Letter of Information 03022022.pdf

Uploaded by: Lee Towers

Position: INFO



Larry Hogan
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt. Governor

Mary Pat Seurkamp, Ph.D.
Chair

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph. D.
Secretary

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, for more information.