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March 3, 2026

The Honorable Ben Barnes  
Chair, Appropriations Committee  
120 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chairman Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and the Honorable Members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Maryland Higher Education Commission respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 721– Uniformed Services Spouses Act, sponsored by Delegate Patterson

HB 721 thoughtfully expands existing benefits and protections afforded to veterans and active service members to include their spouses, recognizing the critical role military families play in supporting service members and the unique challenges they face—particularly frequent relocations, interrupted educational pathways, and barriers to degree completion.

This legislation builds upon Maryland’s longstanding commitment to supporting military-connected students by ensuring that spouses of service members have equitable access to higher education opportunities and campus-based support. Specifically, SB 243 would require public institutions of higher education to extend priority course registration to eligible service members and their spouses, expand veteran-focused support services at community colleges to include spouses, and ensure access to advising, resources, and dedicated study spaces. These provisions promote continuity, stability, and student success for military families navigating higher education.

As it relates to State-administered financial aid, HB 721 would allow Senatorial and Delegate Scholarships to be used at accredited institutions outside Maryland when the applicant is an active service member or the spouse of an active service member domiciled in the State. This change reflects the realities of military service, where duty assignments may require families to reside outside Maryland while maintaining State residency.

Importantly, HB 721 does not create a fiscal or operational impact on the Maryland Higher Education Commission. The bill’s provisions are implemented at the institutional level and do not alter MHEC’s administrative responsibilities, staffing, or budget.

**MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION**

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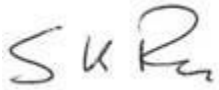
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MHEC supports HB 721 for its recognition of military spouses as an essential part of the military-connected student population and for advancing equitable access to higher education across Maryland's postsecondary system.

For these reasons, the Maryland Higher Education Commission respectfully urges a favorable report on House Bill 721.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Affairs.

Yours in Service,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "S K Rai". The letters are cursive and slightly slanted.

Sanjay Rai

Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission