

HB623_USM_FAV.pdf

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HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

House Bill 623

Education - Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

February 10, 2026

Favorable

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 623. The University System of Maryland (USM) is pleased to offer testimony in support of House Bill 623, legislation that strengthens Maryland's commitment to military-connected students by modernizing definitions within the existing Purple Star Schools Program and creating a new Purple Star Colleges Program to recognize institutions of higher education that provide exemplary support to military-connected learners.

The USM is composed of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the state. Each of USM's 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 three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

House Bill 623 updates the definition of "military-connected student" under current law and establishes a statewide framework for identifying and elevating colleges that demonstrate strong, intentional services for service members, veterans, and their families. House Bill 623's purpose is to ensure consistent terminology across Maryland statutes and to create a **voluntary** recognition program to highlight institutions that excel in transitioning, advising, and supporting military-connected students.

USM institutions have long served as national leaders in educating military-connected populations, and House Bill 623 aligns squarely with our commitment to access, success, and student-centered support. The University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) – one of the largest and most experienced military-serving universities in the world – offers globally deployed education, flexible online programs, specialized advising, and dedicated military/veteran support hubs. These services directly advance the goals of the Purple Star Colleges Program by helping active-duty service members, reservists, veterans, and dependents navigate degree pathways while managing military obligations.

Similarly, Bowie State University, Maryland's first HBCU, maintains a strong track record of supporting military-connected students through its Military Resource Center, veteran-friendly enrollment services, counseling resources, and community partnerships that ease the transition into higher education. Bowie State's culture of inclusion and service reflects exactly the type of holistic support that House Bill 623 aims to highlight and encourage.

The USM strongly believes that Maryland's military-connected residents enrich our campuses with diverse experiences, leadership, and commitment to public service. The creation of a statewide Purple Star Colleges designation can elevate best practices and amplify Maryland's continued leadership in honoring and supporting those who serve.

For these reasons, the University System of Maryland supports House Bill 623 and respectfully urges a favorable report.



HB 623 Purple Star Colleges FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Beatrix Peck

Position: FAV



Letter of Support

House Appropriations Committee
HB 623 (Patterson)
Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges

Matt Power, President
mpower@micua.org
February 10, 2026

On behalf of Maryland’s independent colleges and universities and the more than 56,000 students we serve, thank you for the opportunity to provide a letter of support regarding **[HB 623 \(Patterson\) Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges.](#)**

The bill establishes the Purple Star Program to identify institutions of higher education that offer strong support and service for military-connected students.

The Maryland College Collaboration for Student Veterans Commission was established in 2016 (Ch. 413 of 2016), and MICUA is a designated representative on the Commission. Several MICUA institutions have deep connections to military bases located in proximity, and they have demonstrated a strong commitment to providing a supportive school environment for all students, including veterans and their families. The Commission’s work consists of “ensuring the educational success of returning veterans, including their recruitment, successful transition into higher education, retention, and eventual graduation.”

HB 632 would help to provide additional resources for service members and their families that attend designated Purple Star Colleges. We appreciate that this would be a voluntary program for an institution to opt into if they choose to further enhance and support a student veteran.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Irnande Altema, Vice President for Government and Business Affairs, ialtema@micua.org.

For these reasons, MICUA urges a favorable Committee report for House Bill 632.

Delegate Patterson Testimony in Support of HB0623

Uploaded by: Edith Patterson

Position: FAV

EDITH J. PATTERSON, ED.D.
Legislative District 28
Charles County

Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Chair, Gaming

K-12 Education

Chair, Southern Maryland
House Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 429
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3247
800-492-7122 Ext. 3247
Edith.Patterson@house.maryland.gov

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of HB0623 – Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

For the record, I am Delegate Edith Patterson, sponsor of House Bill 0623, relating to the Purple State Schools Program and the establishment of the Purple Star Colleges Program.

This legislation updates Maryland’s existing Purple Star framework in two key ways. First, it aligns the definition of “military-connected student” under the Purple Star Schools Program with terminology already used in state law. Second, it establishes the Purple State Colleges Program, to recognize colleges that demonstrate strong, intentional support for military-connected students.

As you may recall, I introduced and passed Maryland’s Purple Star Schools Program three years ago to recognize K-12 schools that create welcoming environments for student from military families. HB0623 builds on that foundation by extending recognition to institutions of higher education that provide similar support to military-connected students, including service members, veterans, and their families, as they transition into college.

Under this bill, the Maryland Higher Education Commission will administer the Purple State Colleges Program and designate colleges that choose to apply and meet established criteria. Participating institutions must identify a staff liaison to serve as a point of contact, provide clear and accessible information about enrollments and academic planning, and offer services that support students as they transition to a new college environment.

This program is voluntary and can be implemented with minimal cost by making support services easier to identify and access during periods of transition. And, it allows colleges to highlight their commitment to serving the military community, creating a clear benefit for both institutions and students.

HB0623 honors the service of our military families while strengthening support for their educational success. For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to give HB0623 a favorable report. Thank you for your consideration.

Edith J. Patterson
Charles County, District 28

MMC_Nash HB 623 Purple Star FAVORABLE February 10

Uploaded by: Lynn Nash

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 10, 2026

The Honorable Ben Barnes
The Honorable Anne R. Kaiser
House Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Request for a **FAVORABLE Report** – HB 623 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

Dear Chairman Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and Distinguished Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as their Communications Director, we write to recommend a **Favorable Report** by the Committee on **HB 623 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program** sponsored by Delegate Patterson. This bill expands the definition of “military-connected student” to include children of reserve component service members, already part of Maryland statute; and, it creates a Purple Star Colleges Program that will provide support services to service members, veterans and their spouses and dependents. These services will include a uniformed services liaison; a website with resources targeted to their needs (e.g. such as how to transfer to another school); and, a peer-led transition program. The collegiate program, like the school program, also requires training to acquaint staff to the “culture” of the military and providing an understanding of unique challenges faced by military-connected students so they might provide support.

According to the Department of Veterans and Military Families publication “*2025 DVMF Updates and Best Practices*”, Maryland is home to:

63,100 Service members 24,495 Spouses 43,934 Children of Service members

The average military family moves every [2.5 years](#). As I know from experience, every permanent change of station or PCS move brings great challenges and the need to start fresh (again) for every family member. Frequent moves cause significant strain, including financial burdens, disruption of spousal careers, and the need to constantly rebuild support systems including community, healthcare, and often most significantly ***schools***.

The Maryland Purple Star School Program, one of 43 state programs nationwide, has grown from a single school in 2022, to 31 schools today. In our state with [14 major military installations](#), the award of a Purple Star School designation recognizes a voluntary effort by the school system to create a supportive environment for military-connected students, which transferring in service members use to assess whether a school is a good fit for their children—where they will be welcomed and well-supported. The Purple Star designation demonstrates a ***commitment to excellence***.

Our military-connected students at the college level ***deserve no less***. Since 2022, [19 colleges and two technical schools](#) in the Florida Collegiate Purple Star Program, [51 schools](#) in the Ohio Collegiate Purple

**PO Box 6073 • Annapolis, Maryland 21401-0073
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Subject: Request for a **FAVORABLE Report** – HB 623 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

Star Program and [9 universities and 19 technical community colleges](#) in the Indiana Collegiate Purple Star Program have already earned the collegiate designation.

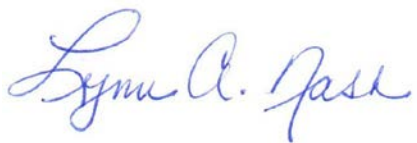
We know that college is already a tough transition. Imagine what it would be like entering college, if you had already been in [six to nine schools](#), the average for military-connected children, between kindergarten and high school graduation. Imagine having credits from six schools that you've collected through years of PCS moves. Having a navigator, a dedicated website of resources, a peer-led transition program, and supportive faculty will greatly assist military-connected students, who are our service members, veterans, their spouses and their dependents, have a successful college experience. To have already given up so much for us, they deserve no less than the creation of a Purple Star College Program.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports** HB 623 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program and asks the Committee for your **FAVORABLE report**.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups, representing over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

The Coalition thanks Delegate Patterson for sponsoring this important legislation and for her on-going support of the Maryland uniformed services community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn A. Nash". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynn A. Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service
Communications Director

1 Attachment – Member Organizations of the Maryland Military Coalition



Member Organizations of the Maryland Military Coalition

Air Force Sergeants Association

American Military Society

American Minority Veterans Research Project

Association of the United States Navy

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

Disabled American Veterans

Fleet Reserve Association of Annapolis

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A

Maryland Air National Guard Retirees' Association

Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Military Officers Association of America

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Military Order of the World Wars

Montford Point Marines of America

National Association of Black Veterans

National Association of Retired Federal Employees, Maryland Veterans

Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

Platoon 22

Reserve Organization of America

Society of Military Widows

Veterans of Foreign Wars

MMC_Nash ORAL HB 623 Purple Star FAVORABLE Februar

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Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

Testimony – Lynn A Nash

HB 623—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

Request for a **FAVORABLE** Report

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and Members of the House Appropriations Committee

My name is Lynn Nash, I'm a retired Captain of the U.S. Public Health Service, a 30-year veteran, with three kids, of which the youngest – Natalie - attended eight schools from kindergarten to high school, and then two universities (10 schools) before she went off to med school. So, I'm a bit of an expert on the topic. I'm here today on behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition as their Communications Director.

Today is a bit of a celebration. In 2022, there was ONE Purple Star School, when I testified in support of Delegate Patterson's original legislation. Today, there are 31 Maryland Purple Star Schools—Schools that have gone an extra distance to support our military-connected families; schools that are committed to excellence.

Delegate Patterson's new bill pushes the standard farther. In addition to aligning a definition, she seeks to have Maryland, a state that has more military installations than most – 14 – join the ranks of at least three states that have Collegiate Purple star programs already in place.

Our need is great. We have:

- almost 132 thousand currently serving service members and their spouses and dependents.
- We have over 348 thousand veterans in addition—in total 480 thousand people that would benefit from a Purple Star Colleges Program. (and that doesn't include veteran spouses)

The partners are identified and any cost should be covered with existing resources.

The Maryland Military Coalition ***strongly supports*** this legislation asks you for a **FAVORABLE** report.

Thank you, Delegate Patterson, for sponsoring this important legislation, your leadership and your on-going support of the uniformed services community.

HB623_College of Southern Maryland Dr Yolanda Wils

Uploaded by: Yolanda Wilson

Position: FAV



House Bill 623
Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program
Dr. Yolanda Wilson, President, College of Southern Maryland
FAVORABLE

February 6, 2026

The College of Southern (CSM) supports House Bill 623 which would establish the Purple Star Colleges Program to recognize higher education institutions that provide strong services and support for military-connected students.

As a regional community college, the College of Southern Maryland takes great pride in partnering with active-duty military, veterans and military dependent students to ensure every student receives the most benefits available as they pursue their education.

In the 2024-2025 academic year, CSM enrolled approximately 1,100 students who self-identified as military-connected (via CSM admissions application). The College had approximately 560 students who submitted requests to use VA education benefits in the same year, resulting in over \$650,000 in Post 9/11 VA education benefit payments.

Overall, CSM currently meets most of the criteria outlined in the bill and should be able to meet the remaining requirements without significant investment. For instance, CSM’s veterans’ affairs team currently acts in the role of a Uniformed Services liaison. This is considered a “best practice” to strive for military-connected students to have a single point of contact whenever possible. CSM’s dedicated staff serves in the following capacities:

- Provides information to newly enrolled students (this information is captured on the admissions application and when the student initiates the process to use VA education benefits at CSM);
- Acts as the point of contact – this includes providing academic advising, degree planning, providing information on financial aid programs (military, MHEC, ED and CSM), providing information on CSM resources, including the student veteran organization; and,
- Partners with the CSM student veterans club, student government association and other CSM departments to provide programming for newly enrolled military-connected students.

College of Southern Maryland

8730 Mitchell Rd, PO Box 910, La Plata, MD 20646
301-934-2251 | askme@csmd.edu

csmd.edu

Additionally, CSM's website provides information on both internal college resources as well as external resources, including veteran-friendly employer sites, VA and military spouse education resources, and veteran-focused mediation services available in the Tri-County area.

CSM has partnered with the Maryland Department of Labor to have monthly information sessions (rotating between all three counties). CSM hosted Veterans' academic and career resource days. In addition, CSM is represented as an ex-officio member of the Calvert County Commission for Veterans Military Families and multiple CSM staff members have been members of the Charles County Commission for Veterans Affairs.

Over the past years, CSM is honored to have earned national recognition multiple times as a Military Friendly School by Viqtory, Inc, through standards that measure an organization's commitment, effort, and success in creating sustainable and meaningful benefits for the military community. Most recently, the College was designated as a 2025-2026 Military Friendly[®] Silver school and a Military Spouse Friendly[®] school.

The College of Southern Maryland will continue to expand our commitment to our veterans and military-connected families by providing the resources and support where our military-affiliated students can find purpose, belonging, and a clear path forward in meeting their educational goals and career success.

CSM would be honored to receive the Purple Star Colleges designation, recognizing the strong services and support that we provide for our military-connected students. As president of the College of Southern Maryland, I respectfully request your favorable report for HB 623.



Yolanda S. Wilson, Ed.D.
President
College of Southern Maryland

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Position: INFO



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Rebecca Taber Staehelin

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Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.

Janet E. Wormack, Ed.D.

Sarah Otwey, Student
Commissioner

Principal Counsel

Kimberly Smith Ward

February 10, 2026

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

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the Appropriations
Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on House Bill 623 –
Education - Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges
Program, sponsored by Patterson. The Maryland Higher Education
Commission (MHEC) submits this letter to outline implementation and
statutory considerations related to the bill.

House Bill 623 establishes the Purple Star Colleges Program within MHEC
to recognize institutions of higher education and private career schools that
demonstrate a commitment to serving veterans, service members, and their
families. MHEC strongly supports the goal of easing transitions for
military-connected students and recognizes the value of a clear, trusted
designation that signals an institution's readiness to meet their unique
academic, financial, and support needs.

MHEC also appreciates the thoughtful expansion of the Purple Star
framework from the K–12 environment into postsecondary education.
Extending this recognition to public and private institutions, as well as
private career schools, has the potential to strengthen continuity across
Maryland's K–20 military support pipeline. At the same time,
implementation in the higher education space presents additional
considerations given the diversity of institutional missions, governance
structures, and student populations.

Under HB 623, MHEC would be responsible for developing designation
criteria, administering application and renewal processes, and ensuring
ongoing adherence to requirements related to professional development,
public-facing resources, and student transition supports. To implement the
program with the consistency, rigor, and credibility envisioned by the
legislation, MHEC has identified a need for dedicated staffing capacity.

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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MHEC's current staffing levels are fully committed to existing statutory, regulatory, and financial aid responsibilities. Successful implementation of the Purple Star Colleges Program would require:

- A Director to lead program development, ensure regulatory alignment, and oversee the designation and renewal process; and
- A Technical Assistance and Outreach Specialist to serve as a liaison to campus military-connected coordinators and to develop and deliver the statewide professional development resources required under the bill.

MHEC currently supports veterans and service members through its State Approving Agency (SAA), which operates under a federally mandated contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In the most recent fiscal year, the SAA provided oversight to more than 400 postsecondary institutions statewide to ensure programs meet federal requirements for GI Bill® eligibility. This work is highly technical, compliance-driven, and narrowly defined by federal statute.

Because the administration of the Purple Star Colleges Program falls outside the scope of the SAA's federal contract, and given the intensity of the SAA's existing responsibilities, those functions cannot be absorbed within current resources. Dedicated, state-funded staff would be necessary to ensure the Purple Star designation remains meaningful, sustainable, and trusted by students and institutions alike.

The Purple Star Colleges Program has the potential to serve as an important tool for military-connected students navigating Maryland's postsecondary landscape. MHEC looks forward to the continued collaboration to ensure the program is implemented in a way that upholds its intent and long-term success.

Yours in Service,



Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.
Secretary
Maryland Higher Education Commission

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Position: INFO



Governor

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Lt. Governor

Aruna Miller

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Sarah Otwey, Student
Commissioner

Principal Counsel

Kimberly Smith Ward

February 10, 2026

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Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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The Purple Star Colleges Program has the potential to serve as an important tool for military-connected students navigating Maryland's postsecondary landscape. MHEC looks forward to the continued collaboration to ensure the program is implemented in a way that upholds its intent and long-term success.

Yours in Service,



Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.
Secretary
Maryland Higher Education Commission