

## WRITTEN TESTIMONY

### SENATE BILL 709

Education Purple Star Colleges Program

Position FAVORABLE

Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is The Honorable Dr Cashenna A Cross. I am a retired United States Air Force veteran with more than two decades of active duty service, including combat deployments. I have served as Mayor and Councilwoman at Large in the City of Glenarden, Maryland, and I remain actively engaged in veteran advocacy through American Legion Post 275 and the American Legion Auxiliary. I am also commissioned by the State of Maryland as a licensed Life, Accident, Health and Safety Insurance Producer.

I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 709.

Throughout my military career and subsequent public service, I have witnessed firsthand the strain placed on service members, veterans, and their families during transitions. Relocation, deployment cycles, and reintegration into civilian life often intersect with educational disruption. Higher education institutions must be prepared to receive military connected students with clarity, structure, and accountability.

Senate Bill 709 establishes a Purple Star Colleges Program that mirrors the intent already embraced at the K through 12 level. It requires a designated liaison, accessible information, structured transition support, and professional development for staff. These are practical safeguards that ensure a veteran, a service member, or a dependent is not navigating enrollment and academic planning alone.

The bill defines military connected students to include service members, veterans, and their dependents. That broader recognition reflects the reality of today military community and honors the full spectrum of those who have served and sacrificed.

The fiscal impact reflects limited and manageable State expenditures associated with implementation, while participation by institutions remains voluntary. This approach balances meaningful support with fiscal responsibility.

As someone who has served in uniform and later led at the municipal level, I understand the importance of institutional accountability. When Maryland signals that it values military connected students, it must do so with standards that are clear and enforceable. Senate Bill 709

accomplishes that objective.

My professional work in financial services further reinforces the importance of stability and structured support systems. As a State of Maryland licensed Life, Accident, Health and Safety Insurance Producer, I work daily with families on issues of financial security, risk management, and generational planning. Education is a foundational component of wealth equity and long term family stability. When military families are supported in accessing and completing higher education, we strengthen economic mobility, reduce financial vulnerability, and promote stronger multigenerational outcomes.

Military families have carried the weight of national defense. The State should ensure that when they enter our colleges and universities, they encounter clarity, coordination, and respect.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on Senate Bill 709.

Respectfully submitted,

The Honorable Dr Cashenna A Cross

Retired United States Air Force

Councilwoman at Large City of Glenarden

State of Maryland Licensed Life Accident Health and Safety Insurance Producer