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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 7 – Afghan Scholarship End Termination Date

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 7.

I worked with the Department of Veterans and Military Families and other military and education advocates on this bill.

The bill simply removes the termination date of June 2030 on the “Douglas J. J. Peters Veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts Scholarship” and allows it to continue until the General Assembly believes it no longer serves its purpose, just like every other scholarship in our Maryland laws.

Thereby giving our military families some certainty for planning for their family’s educational path.

Currently, the scholarship arbitrarily terminates in 4 years.

So instead of adding a couple years every so often, this bill gives certainty, to those brave men and woman and their families who sacrificially served our nation, that their scholarship benefits will be there going forward, and not end on some arbitrary date.

There is no fiscal note for this year, no increased funding amounts but it does continue the same commitment as we have made for the past 20 years.

Also, there have been no budget talks about reducing PINs at MHEC at the termination of the scholarship, so this will have no impact on the normal budgeting going forward.

To give a little history:

- In 2006, the scholarship was created with a termination date of 2012.

- In 2008, the scholarship was extended to 2016 (with MHEC favorable)
- In 2012, the scholarship was again extended to 2020 (with MHEC favorable)
- In 2020, the scholarship was again extended to 2030 (with MHEC no position)
- In 2023, the scholarship program was named after former Senator and my friend, Doug Peters, whom many of you served with in the Senate and died later that year... 2 days after his 60th birthday.
- The *Afghanistan conflict* was the longest war in our history lasting 20 years from September 11, 2001, and ending just 4 ½ years ago in August 2021.

So, who does the Scholarship apply to:

This scholarship is for those who served in the *Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts* and their dependents.

It applies to:

- *Veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts*
- *Active service members who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts;*
- *Reserve component members who were activated as a result of the Afghanistan or Iraq conflict; or*
- *A spouse, daughter, son, stepdaughter, stepson of any who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts,*

So think about it, especially with the commitment we made to their dependents, it makes no sense to terminate the scholarship anytime soon.

Just for illustrative purposes highlighting the arbitrary termination date of 2030, imagine someone who served sometime in Afghanistan between 2020 and 2021:

- A young individual enlisted in 2018 and serves 20 years before completing their service and as a veteran at age of 40 seeks a scholarship in 2038.
- If that enlisted member had a child in 2033 at the age of 35, their child would need the scholarship in 2051.

If decades in the future, the General Assembly sees the scholarship program is no longer being used or affordable, they can address it at that point, just like they do for every other scholarship program.

By removing the termination date, it sends a clear message that Maryland honors its military and provides security for those planning to use the scholarship program at a later date.

We made a commitment to these men and women along with their families, and we should not terminate that commitment.

The mission of the *Department of Veterans and Military Families* is to serve veterans, service members and their families and this bill lines up with that mission.

In conclusion, this bill:

- Has no fiscal impact on this year's budget
- Provides security for our military families when planning their educational needs,
- Is projected to be needed for decades to come,
- Alleviates the General Assembly's constant modifying the termination date and aligns with all our other educational scholarships, and the termination date serves no effective purpose, and
- Honors the commitment we made to our service members and their families

For all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration.