

## **SB 709 Testimony Draft**

### **1. Opening Statement**

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee. My name is Giuseppe Mellinger. Many of you know me as Senator Simonaire's intern, but I am also a Contracted Army ROTC Cadet at Loyola University Maryland, a school that proudly supports veterans and military-connected students. I am here today to testify in support of SB 709.

### **2. Purpose of the Bill**

SB 709 creates the Purple Star Colleges Program within the Maryland Higher Education Commission to recognize colleges that provide strong support for military-connected students. The bill:

- Requires a designated staff liaison to identify military students, serve as their point of contact, coordinate services, and support their transition.
- Requires an easily accessible webpage with information on enrollment, registration, academic planning and more
- Requires a student-led transition program, when appropriate.
- Requires professional development for staff on issues affecting military-connected students
- Updates the definition of "military-connected student" for the K-12 Purple Star Schools Program and establishes a definition for the new college-level program.

### **3. Why This Matters**

Military-connected students often relocate frequently and face unique challenges when entering higher education. SB 709 ensures they have a clear point of contact through the required liaison, centralized and accessible information through the required webpage, transition support through student-led programs, and staff who are better prepared through required professional development. For me, having a dedicated staff member at every college would mean military-connected students always know exactly who to go to—making transitions smoother and helping ensure none of my fellow servicemembers fall through the cracks.

Maryland has many colleges—like Loyola University Maryland—that already provide strong support for military-connected students, but that support isn't consistent statewide. SB 709 creates a uniform standard so every institution that chooses to participate meets the

same expectations, and students don't have to rely on luck or geography to get the help they need.

#### **4. Closing**

For these reasons, I respectfully urge a favorable report on SB 709. Thank you for your consideration.

#### **Fiscal note:**

- MHEC general fund expenditures increase by \$43,821 in FY 2027 and \$46,400 in FY 2028 to hire a half-time contractual program manager to implement the program.
- After FY 2028, ongoing responsibilities are expected to be absorbable by MHEC.
- Participation by colleges is voluntary, and any institutional costs are likely absorbable.
- MSDE can update regulations for the existing Purple Star Schools Program with existing resources.
- The bill has minimal small business impact.