

SB709_USM_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Andy Clark

Position: FAV



SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Senate Bill 709

Education - Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

March 4, 2026

Favorable

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 709. The University System of Maryland (USM) is pleased to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 709, 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.

Senate Bill 709 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. Senate Bill 709'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 Senate Bill 709 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 Senate Bill 709 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 Senate Bill 709 and respectfully urges a favorable report.



MICUA SB 709 Purple Star Colleges FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Beatrix Peck

Position: FAV



Letter of Support

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB 709 (Carozza)
Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges

Matt Power, President

mpower@micua.org

March 04, 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 **[SB 709 \(Carozza\) 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."

SB 709 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 Senate Bill 709.

SB709_Testimony_Cross Cashenna A.pdf

Uploaded by: Dr Cashenna A Cross

Position: FAV

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

SB 709 Testimony Draft.pdf

Uploaded by: Giuseppe Mellinger

Position: FAV

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.

Support for Senate Bill 709 Letter 3-2-26.pdf

Uploaded by: Heidi Anderson

Position: FAV



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EASTERN SHORE
Office of the President

March 2, 2026

The Honorable
Mary Beth Carozza
Maryland Senate
Annapolis, Maryland

Re: Support for Senate Bill 709: Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

Dear Senators Carozza:

On behalf of the University of Maryland Eastern Shore, I write to express support for Senate Bill 709 Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program, recognizing the bill's alignment with the universities mission to advance access, equity, and high-quality educational opportunities for Maryland residents. The University of Maryland Eastern Shore remains committed to fostering academic excellence, strengthening the state's workforce, and supporting legislative initiatives that enhance student success and military community well-being.

Senate Bill 709 provides a framework that supports Maryland's long-term educational and economic goals. The proposed measures promote greater coordination, improved resource stewardship, and expanded opportunities for military connected students and the families we serve. As higher education continues to evolve in response to changing workforce demands and student needs, policies that reinforce stability, transparency, and innovation are vital to the state's continued growth.

The University of Maryland Eastern Shore appreciates the General Assembly's ongoing commitment to higher education and values the constructive partnership that enables our institutions to serve Marylanders effectively. We look forward to continued collaboration as the bill advances through the legislative process. Thank you for your dedication to Maryland's students, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Heidi M. Anderson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Heidi" being the most prominent.

Heidi M. Anderson, Ph.D.
President
University of Maryland Eastern Shore

MMC_Nash SB 709 Purple Star FAVORABLE March 4 2026

Uploaded by: Lynn Nash

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

March 4, 2026

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: Request for a **FAVORABLE Report** – SB 709 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

Dear Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Distinguished Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition, I write to request a **Favorable Report** by the Committee on **SB 709 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program** sponsored by Senator Carozza. 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](#). Every permanent change of station (PCS) move brings great challenges and the need for every family member to “start fresh”. Frequent moves cause significant strain, including financial burdens, disruption of spousal careers, and the need to constantly rebuild support systems including community, healthcare, and 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
(301) 583-8687 • (800) 808-4517**

Subject: Request for a **FAVORABLE Report** – SB 709 – 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.

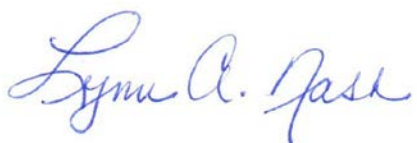
It is a common fact that college is already a difficult transition for students who have attended [six to nine schools](#), the average for military-connected children, between kindergarten and high school graduation. This includes having credits from several schools collected through years of PCS moves. 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 SB 709 – Education—Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program*** and asks the Committee for a ***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. To learn more about our organization, please visit our [website](#).

The Coalition thanks Senator Carozza for sponsoring this important legislation and for her continuing support of the Maryland uniformed services community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn A. Nash". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lynn" being the most prominent.

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

Application Example.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Beth Carozza

Position: FAV



APPLICATION

*Applications due **October 24th, 2025***

Below are the criteria necessary to be considered for the Collegiate Purple Star designation. After each item, please include a succinct statement that explains how your institution meets that criterion. When applicable, please include any web links that can also verify your statements. If you have any questions, please contact CollegiatePurpleStar@highered.ohio.gov.

Criteria

As referenced in the criteria below, service members, veterans, their spouses, and dependents are all part of the military-connected student population. The following criteria are minimally required for an institution to receive the Collegiate Purple Star designation:

1. House Bill 488 Compliance – A commitment to the policies and procedures outlined therein to include the completion of the required student survey.

a. Establish a dedicated point of contact and/or military/veteran center or office. Tasks can include but are not limited to processing of VA Educational Benefits, development of mentoring programs, provision for a student veteran organization, provision of graduation honor cords, single point of contact for information on campus resources. The dedicated point of contact needs to be someone other than your primary SCO. The institution must have a representative on the Ohio Veterans Education Council (OVEC) and participate in regular OVEC meetings. (OVEC members are generally the person designated as the single point of contact for their institution.)

If applicant is a public institution, please verify your contact information found at <https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/campus-initiatives/education-for-veterans/vet-services-ohio-campuses>.

Enter contact information here:

If applicant is an independent college or university, please provide contacts for your institutions based on <https://highered.ohio.gov/initiatives/campus-initiatives/education-for-veterans/vet-services-ohio-campuses>

Enter contact information here:

b. Establish priority registration for veterans and service members.

Show evidence or explain your process of priority registration. Veterans and service members must have some type of priority registration. Please provide a link that can verify this information.

c. Establish a process for the acceptance and evaluation of military credit and MTAGS per legislative and Chancellor guidelines. Non-public institutions that do not participate in statewide transfer agreements

such as MTAGs are not expected to guarantee that coursework but are expected to evaluate it for potential use in their academic programs.

Briefly explain your institution's process for awarding credit based on military training. Public institutions should mention how MTAGs are processed as well.

d. Integrate existing career services to create and encourage meaningful collaborative relationships between student service members, veterans, and alumni of the institution that link student service members and veterans with prospective employers. Student service members and veterans are to be provided social opportunities and, if the institution has career services programs, encourage the responsible office to seek and promote partnership opportunities for internships and employment of student service members and veterans with state, local, national, and international employers.

Briefly describe what your career services office does to promote military-connected students.

e. Survey student service members, veterans, spouses, and dependents to identify their needs and challenges and make the survey available to faculty and staff at the respective institution or general public. Periodically conduct follow-up surveys, at a frequency determined by the board of trustees, to gauge the institution's progress toward meeting identified needs and challenges.

Describe your survey process and the frequency at which you have or plan to conduct future surveys. Also, briefly explain how your institution tracks military-connected students.

f. Allow for the establishment of a student-led group on campus for student service members and veterans and encourage other service member- and veteran-friendly organizations.

Verify that there are no prohibitions to creating a student-led, military-connected group on campus and note any military-connected student group(s) on your campus. A student-led group does not have to currently exist on your campus.

g. No state institution of higher education, as defined in section 3345.011 of the Revised Code, shall charge a student who is a veteran or a service member any fee for the evaluation of, transcription of, or application for college credit for military experience. Non-public institutions should strive for little to no cost as part of the evaluation and transcription process for service members and veterans.

Public institutions, please affirm that you are not charging a veteran or service member any fee for the evaluation, transcription, and application of military coursework, training, and experience. Independent colleges and universities, please note what your fee structure is and if you have considered waiving it for veterans and service members.

2. Institution has implemented the current Keys to Veteran Success and can verify each element.

Keys to Veteran Success can be found at <https://www.ed.gov/veterans-and-military-families/8-keys-success-sites>. Please summarize your compliance and provide examples.

1. How is your institution creating a culture of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote well-being and success for veterans?
2. How is your institution ensuring consistent and sustained support from campus leadership?

3. *Does your institution have an early alert system to ensure all veterans receive academic, career, and financial advice before challenges become overwhelming?*
4. *How does your institution coordinate and centralize campus efforts for all veterans, together with the creation of a designated space for them (even if limited in size)? Please verify that a meeting space would be available upon request by military-connected students.*
5. *How does your institution collaborate with local communities and organizations, including government agencies, to align and coordinate various services for veterans?*
6. *Does your institution utilize a uniform set of data tools to collect and track information on veterans, including demographics, retention, and degree completion?*
7. *Does your institution provide comprehensive professional development for faculty and staff on issues and challenges unique to veterans? In the event of a lack of resources, evidence of sharing training between institutions would be acceptable.*
8. *Has your institution developed systems that ensure sustainability of effective practices for veterans?*

3. Institution has implemented the current Principles of Excellence and can verify each element.

Principles of Excellence can be found at http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/principles_of_excellence.asp. Please summarize your Compliance and provide examples.

- A written personal summary of the total cost of your educational program, including:
 - The costs covered by your benefits.
 - The financial aid for which you may qualify.
 - Your expected student loan debt after you graduate.
 - Other information to help you compare aid packages offered by different schools.

- Give an educational plan with a timeline showing how and when you can fulfill everything required for you to graduate.
- Assign a point of contact who will provide ongoing academic and financial advice (including access to disability counseling).
- Allow for you to be gone for both long and short periods of time due to service obligations (service you must fulfill) for active-duty service members and Reservists.
- Make sure all new programs are accredited (officially approved) before enrolling students.
- Make sure their refund policies follow Title IV rules, which guide federal student financial aid programs.
- End fraudulent (deceitful) and aggressive methods of recruiting.

4. Institutional policies regarding military-connected students that are clearly posted and available (catalog, webpage specifically for veterans) – Policies on deployments, application fees, tutoring, transfer credit, transfer credit appeals process, Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits, tuition assistance, military dependent issues, etc. Information about these policies should be readily available to enrolled students and employed faculty and staff.

Please note where military-connected students can find policies or guidance on the issues noted in this criterion. Provide links to these documents/policies.

5. A written policy to work with off-campus stakeholders such as PreK-12 Purple Star Schools, Ohio Department of Veterans Services, U.S. Veterans Affairs, Ohio Department of Higher Education, Ohio National Guard, and other related community organizations to strengthen resources and policies geared toward military-connected students. Institutions should plan to engage with their regional [PreK-12 Purple Star Schools](#) to develop partnerships, share resources, and potentially pursue student mentorship programs within existing local school districts' guidelines.

The intent is to have a written policy in place but understand that in some cases that takes time. Please discuss your institution's plans to work with various off-campus stakeholders mentioned above as well as what plans you have to sustain those relationships (via a policy or not). Also explain your plan to achieve a written policy.

6. Is the institutions approval through the Ohio State Approving Agency to accept VA Education Benefits under Title 38 current (current catalog on file)? Please provide the last reapproval date.

To locate the last approval date, review the SAA-9 Approval Letter or VA WEAMS report. For questions about the institutions approval status, email OhioSAA@dvs.ohio.gov or visit [State Approving Agency | Department of Veterans Services](#)

Additional Criteria Not Required, But Strongly Recommended

1. Participation in the Department of Defense Memorandum of Understanding for Federal Tuition Assistance (commonly referred to as the DoD MOU).

Proof of DoD MOU participation will be verified at www.dodmou.com/Home/InstitutionList.

2. Participation in the Yellow Ribbon program when applicable (many public institutions' tuition rates are below the need to participate in the Yellow Ribbon program).

Proof of participation in Yellow Ribbon program will be verified via www.va.gov/education/yellow-ribbon-participating-schools.

3. Asking students for military transcripts, including but not limited to the Community College of the Air Force & Joint Service Transcript, Defense Language Institute, etc. should be a required part of an institution's admissions process. However, institutional receipt of those transcripts should not be used to delay an admissions decision.

Verify if your institution requires all military transcripts for evaluation purposes.

President or Provost Electronic Signature/Date

X

Please email your completed application to CollegiatePurpleStar@highered.ohio.gov by the end of day on **October 24th, 2025**.

SB 709 - Carozza Testimony_FINAL.pdf

Uploaded by: Mary Beth Carozza

Position: FAV

MARY BETH CAROZZA
Legislative District 38
Somerset, Wicomico,
and Worcester Counties

Education, Energy, and
the Environment Committee

Executive Nominations Committee



Annapolis Office
James Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street, Room 316
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3645 • 301-858-3645
800-492-7122 Ext. 3645
Fax 410-841-3006 • 301-858-3006
MaryBeth.Carozza@senate.state.md.us

THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 4, 2026

The Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
SB 709 – Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges
Program
Statement of Support by Bill Sponsor Senator Mary Beth Carozza

Thank you Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and my fellow members of the distinguished Senate Education, Energy, and Environment Committee for this opportunity to present Senate Bill 709 – Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program and ask for a favorable report.

I want to thank Senator Simonaire for his leadership in prioritizing the inclusion of institutions of higher education in the Purple Heart School Program and for cosponsoring along with Committee colleagues – Senators Brooks, Harris, Simonaire, and Watson – this important legislation that would simply expand the current Purple Star Program to include institutions of higher education. I also want to make the Committee aware that the crossfile, House Bill 623, unanimously passed the House on February 26.

I especially appreciate sponsoring Senate Bill 709 as I represent three institutions of higher education – Salisbury University, University of Maryland Eastern Shore, and Wor-Wic Community College, along with an active community of veterans and military families.

By way of background, the Maryland Purple Star Program is a state-sponsored K-12 initiative designed to recognize and support schools that excel in providing resources and a welcoming environment for students from military families. The program is completely voluntary and was established by House Bill 1026 and Senate Bill 707 of 2024, both of which unanimously passed the Maryland General Assembly and were signed into law.

Students whose families serve our nation in the military have a distinct set of needs and require differentiated support to succeed. The Purple Star Program recognizes the schools that provide more services for our veterans, service members, and their families. To earn the Purple Star designation, a school must have a dedicated military liaison, provide accessible digital resources, offer a student-led transition program, and ensure staff are trained to meet the unique needs of military families.

The Maryland State Department of Education was able to implement the Purple Star K-12 Program with existing resources and no additional staffing. Other states, such as Ohio, Indiana, and Florida, have implemented the Purple Star Colleges Program with no additional costs and

some have used a voluntary commission of educators to review applications. As an example, I have included the Ohio Department of Higher Education's application in your testimony packet.

SB 709 would simply extend the Purple Star Program 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. This program would allow colleges to highlight their commitment to serving the military community, creating a clear benefit for both institutions and students.

I thank you for your kind attention and consideration, and I respectfully request a favorable report on SB 709.

SB 709 LOI.pdf

Uploaded by: Meghan Music

Position: INFO

**Governor**

Wes Moore

Lt. Governor

Aruna Miller

Secretary

Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.

Commission Chair

Catherine J. "Cassie" Motz

Commission Vice Chair

Chike Aguh

Commissioners

Kathleen Bands, Ph.D.

Mickey L. Burnim, Ph.D.

Charlene Mickens Dukes, Ed.D.

Barbara Kerr Howe

Narcisa A. Polonio, Ed.D.

Rebecca Taber Staehelin

Sheila D. Thompson, Ph.D.

Craig A. Williams, Ph.D.

Janet E. Wormack, Ed.D.

Sarah Otwey, Student
Commissioner

Principal Counsel

Kimberly Smith Ward

March 4, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair,
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on Senate Bill 709 – Education – Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program, sponsored by Senator Carozza. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) submits this letter to outline implementation and statutory considerations related to the bill.

SB 709 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 SB 709, 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.

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

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

217 East Redwood Street • Suite 2100 • Baltimore, MD 21202

T 410.767.3300 • 800.974.0203 • F 410.332.0270 • TTY for the Deaf 800.735.2258 www.mhec.maryland.gov

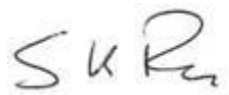
- A Technical Assistance and Outreach Specialist to serve as a liaison to campus military-connected coordinators and to develop and deliver the statewide professional development resources required under the bill.

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 continued collaboration to ensure the program is implemented in a way that upholds its intent and long-term success.

Yours in Service,



Secretary,

Maryland Higher Education Commission