

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 721

Appropriations

Uniformed Services Spouses Act

This bill (1) expands eligibility for priority registration for courses at public institutions of higher education; (2) extends eligibility for veterans' services at community colleges to veterans' spouses; (3) expands eligibility for senatorial and delegate scholarships to active service members' spouses; (4) expands eligibility for hiring and promotion preferences relating to veterans; and (5) expands the veterans eligible for credits on selection tests for applicants of specified State and local employee positions.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's requirements can be handled with existing budgeted resources, as discussed below. No effect on revenues.

Local Effect: Local finances are not materially affected, as discussed below.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary/Current Law:

Priority Registration for Public Higher Education Institutions

Current Law: Public institutions of higher education must grant priority registration for courses to an eligible service member. The priority registration requirement applies only within 15 years after an eligible service member was last on active duty and does not apply after an eligible service member's fourth academic year. "Eligible service member" is defined as an active service member or a veteran who has received an honorable discharge or a certificate of satisfactory completion of service.

Under the Bill: The bill expands priority registration at public higher education institutions for service members to include a veteran who has received an other than dishonorable discharge (instead of only an honorable discharge) and to also include the spouse of an eligible service member.

Veterans Resource Centers at Community Colleges

Current Law: Each community college must (1) employ at least one individual whose job duties and responsibilities include providing comprehensive and intensive enrollment and advising services to current and prospective students who are veterans; (2) ensure all student advisors are trained on the unique needs and resources available to students who are veterans; and (3) establish a veterans resource center on campus. Veterans resource centers are established to (1) provide access to federal and State veterans resources; (2) serve as a quiet place for veterans to study; (3) enable veterans to connect to other veterans; and (4) be the central hub for all activities on campus related to veterans.

Under the Bill: The bill expands the requirements above to also include spouses of veterans.

Senatorial and Delegate Scholarships

Current Law: Senatorial and delegate scholarships allow each senator and delegate to make scholarship awards during a term of office. The exact qualifications and selection criteria differ across the senatorial and delegate scholarship awards. Senators and delegates may award scholarships, as specified, to active service members who are domiciled in the State to be used at an out-of-state institution of higher education. A recipient of a senatorial scholarship who is an active service member and otherwise meets specified conditions may maintain eligibility for the scholarship by being domiciled in the State (rather than being eligible for in-State tuition).

Under the Bill: The bill extends the provisions above regarding senatorial and delegate scholarships to be applicable to spouses of active service members.

Hiring and Promotion Preferences – In General

Current Law: An employer, including a county or municipality, may grant a hiring and promotion preference to an eligible veteran, the spouse of an eligible veteran who has a service-connected disability, the spouse of an eligible active service member, or the surviving spouse of a deceased eligible veteran. Granting this preference does not violate any State or local Equal Employment Opportunity law. A county or municipality that elects to offer this hiring or promotion preference may adopt a local law granting the preference before implementing the preference.

An “eligible veteran” is a veteran, as defined in § 9-901 of the State Government Article, who has received an honorable discharge or a certificate of satisfactory completion of service, including a reserve component, the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service (PHS), and the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Under § 9-901 of the State Government Article, a veteran is a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released under nondishonorable conditions.

Under the Bill: The bill makes clarifying changes to statutory language in the Labor and Employment Article.

Hiring and Promotion Preferences – Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission

Current Law: The Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC) may grant a hiring and promotion preference to an eligible veteran, the spouse of an eligible veteran who has a service-connected disability, or the surviving spouse of a deceased eligible veteran. An eligible veteran is a veteran of any branch of the uniformed services who has received an honorable discharge or a certificate of satisfactory completion of military service, including a reserve component, the Commissioned Corps of PHS , and the Commissioned Corps of NOAA. Granting this preference does not violate any State or local Equal Employment Opportunity law.

Under the Bill: WSSC may also grant a hiring and promotion preference to the spouse of an active service member. The bill also changes the definition of “eligible veteran” to be a veteran who has received an other than dishonorable discharge (instead of honorable discharge).

State Employees within the State Personnel Management System

Current Law: For positions in the State Personnel Management System for which selection tests are used, certain credits may be applied to the results of selection tests for applicants who are otherwise qualified and have at least the minimum passing score on a selection test. This includes the application of 10 points on any selection test for eligible veterans, spouses of active service members, spouses of veterans with service-connected disabilities, and surviving spouses of a deceased eligible veteran; an appointing authority must also apply a credit of two additional points on any selection test for a former prisoner of war. An “eligible veteran” is a veteran who has received an honorable discharge or a certificate of satisfactory completion of service, including a reserve component.

Chapters 272 and 273 of 2025 authorize counties or municipalities that use selection tests to hire or promote employees to award 10 credit points on the test, or their equivalent, to eligible veterans (as defined by § 7-207 of the State Personnel and Pensions Article), spouses of active service members, spouses of veterans with service-connected disabilities, and surviving spouses of a deceased eligible veteran.

Under the Bill: An “eligible veteran” is a veteran who has received an other than dishonorable discharge (instead of honorable discharge) or a certificate of satisfactory completion of service and also includes the Commissioned Corps of PHS and the Commissioned Corps of NOAA. This expanded definition also applies to counties and municipalities that use selection tests and provide credits.

State and Local Expenditures: The bill’s changes necessitate minor changes to the Department of Budget and Management’s JobAps system, as well as associated guides and training materials. Any expenses from these changes are likely minimal and assumed to be absorbable within existing budgeted resources.

The bill does not alter the total dollar amount a senator or delegate may award in scholarships each year; thus, there is no fiscal impact associated with the bill’s expansion to include active service members’ spouses.

Public senior institutions of higher education, Baltimore City Community College, and local community colleges can handle the bill’s requirements using existing budgeted resources.

Awarding discretionary preferences or credits has no direct effect on local governmental finances.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: SB 243 (Senator Simonaire, *et al.*) - Education, Energy, and the Environment.

Information Source(s): Maryland Municipal League; Maryland Higher Education Commission; Baltimore City Community College; University System of Maryland; Morgan State University; St. Mary’s College of Maryland; Department of Budget and Management; Maryland Department of Labor; Maryland Department of Transportation; Public Service Commission; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 12, 2026
sj/jkb

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