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January 20, 2022

Maryland General Assembly
Attn: House Ways and Means Committee
Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs Committee
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: HB 277 and SB 234: Establishment of Maryland's Purple Star School Designation Program

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony supporting HB 277 and SB 234. I submit this testimony to communicate the [Military Child Education Coalition®'s](#) (MCEC® -- the National Advocate for the Purple Star School Designation Program™) strongest support for this legislation. MCEC's Board of Directors, President & Chief Executive Officer Dr. Becky Porter, and I are deeply grateful for Delegate Patterson, Senator Jackson, and all co-sponsors' leadership in authoring, sponsoring and putting this legislation forward. We urge the respective committees to move this bill forward to the full House and Senate for full and affirmative votes.

With eventual passage of this legislation, Maryland will join the innovative and impactful precedent set by 28 other states (AL, AK, AR, CA, CT, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, LA, ME, MO, MT, NE, NV, NH, NM, NC, ND, OH, OK, SC, TN, TX, UT, VA and WV) that have already adopted and implemented the [Purple Star School Designation Program](#) (PSSDP). Like Maryland, [7 other states \(DE, MA, MI, NY, PA, VT, and WA\)](#) have also introduced legislation to implement the PSSDP.

Maryland's, and all of America's, military-connected children experience academic and social-emotional challenges as they relocate to new schools due to a parent's change in duty station, and deal with both the separations and reintegration challenges inherent to operational deployments. These transitions create challenges since schools often have differing cultures, curricula, standards, course offerings, schedules and graduation requirements. As a result, many students struggle to stay on track to be college-, work- and life-ready. This has the potential to impact military readiness by degrading retention of service members and the economic viability of local communities and states that host military installations.

Military-connected students must move whenever their active-duty parent receives a relocation order (called a Permanent Change of Station, or PCS). A military-connected child can potentially move six to nine times from kindergarten through high school graduation, with approximately 200,000 students transitioning to a new school in any given year. Eighty (80) percent of America's military-connected children attend public schools. In every state with a military installation, military-connected children will be transitioning into and out of nearby public schools due to a parent's PCS orders. With an estimated 1.2 million active-duty military-connected U.S. children enrolled in schools in the United States and abroad, the number of children affected by these transitions is significant.

A Purple Star School designation lets military parents know – whether they are on active duty, in the National Guard and Reserves, or proud veterans -- that a school is dedicated to helping their child gain the educational skills necessary to be college-, work- and life-ready. It signals that a school also supports the social and emotional wellbeing of military kids adjusting to new schools, the absence of a parent during deployment, and the reintegration issues often inherent to deployment.

A Purple Star School program offers states the following benefits:

- All states have obligations under the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. Although the Purple Star School program is not funded by or associated with the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3, which administers the Compact), a statewide Purple Star School program shares the Compact's goals of ensuring that military children transition successfully into new schools and stay on track for graduation.
- It helps protect state revenue. The Department of Defense typically includes the quality of K-12 schools near military facilities as part of its calculus in deciding future basing and personnel decisions. Communities with Purple Star Schools can help retain bases and attract military families who bring economic benefits to local communities.
- Purple Star Schools foster diverse, inclusive and supportive school environments through their initiatives and trainings, which serves all students, regardless of military connection.

To better understand the landscape around and impact of the Purple Star School program, MCEC engaged the Center for Public Research and Leadership (CPRL) at Columbia University to conduct a study of the program across four states. [In this report](#), we summarize the findings of that investigation, assessing the strengths of current initiatives, identifying potential areas of growth, and offering recommendations to guide the improvement of both extant and emergent initiatives.

We found that the Purple Star School program has already gained traction and motivated hundreds of schools and scores of districts to improve services for military-connected students and families. This is especially notable given that the program has been in place for less than three years in most states, with a third of that time overlapping the COVID-19 health crisis.

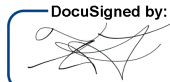
- The Purple Star School program's true value derives from its potential to:
 - Centralize and make knowledge accessible,
 - Develop stakeholder networks, and
 - Support schools in cultivating and communicating cultural competency in supporting military-connected families.
- Most Purple Star Schools and districts already had programming for military-families in place before seeking designation. Still, staff and faculty report that they have benefitted from the Purple Star School application process and the encouragement to refine and expand programming related to the program designation requirements.
- Of the core designation requirements, selecting a point-of-contact, training more staff and faculty, and establishing new student transition programs are commonly cited as the highest-impact activities. Designing an accessible and relevant dedicated webpage is still a need for many schools.
- Schools and districts appreciate and benefit from the recognition and publicity the designation offers, but brand recognition for the program among families is still fairly low – this legislation will go a long way in advancing that best-practice recognition throughout the state and nation.

- Simple steps — outlined throughout this enclosed report — can help states, districts, and schools continue to refine Purple Star School programs and offerings as well as build recognition for the program. MCEC is currently partnering with CPRL for a follow-on study to examine progress to date, identify best practices, and recommend additional elements that could strengthen each state’s Purple Star School program.

As such, MCEC can’t overstate how important and beneficial this legislation will be in ensuring Maryland’s optimum compliance with its Interstate Compact responsibilities, but more importantly in continuing and extending Maryland’s leadership in supporting military families, which ultimately supports retention and military readiness. We wholeheartedly endorse passage of this legislation.

Point of contact for this witness testimony is the undersigned at tim.farrell@militarychild.org, office (254) 953-1923 ext. 1124, and mobile (210) 237-8591.

With Deep Respect and Gratitude,

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