



THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

HB 0980: Higher Education - Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program - Eligibility

Position: FAVORABLE

Good afternoon Mr. Chair, Mr. Vice Chair, and my esteemed colleagues on the Appropriations Committee. My name is Delegate Brian Crosby, and I am here to present HB 0980: Higher Education - Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program - Eligibility. The purpose of this bill is to provide a mandated process for verifying eligibility for this scholarship.

The Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program awards scholarships to certain veterans and their families. Eligible recipients include the children, stepchildren, and surviving spouses of a member of the United States Armed Forces who died as a result of military service or who suffered a service-connected 100% permanent disability as a result of military service, and veterans who have sustained a service-connected disability of 25% or greater and has exhausted or is no longer eligible for Federal veterans' educational benefits.

Under current law, there is no mandated process for verifying eligibility for the Conroy Scholarship. At each higher education institution across the state, individual and non-uniform methods have been used to verify eligibility for the scholarship. At some universities, individuals with a living sponsor must complete a form requiring the veteran sponsor to disclose information regarding his or her disability for the applicant to receive the scholarship. At some other public Maryland universities, an applicant must submit this form with an explanation for the veteran's disability rating. Understandably, many veterans are reluctant to submit this information to the university as the request is intrusive.

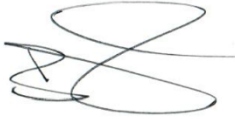
The other common option for verifying eligibility is for the university to receive written correspondence from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) verifying a veteran's disability rating. The university can only receive this documentation after the veteran has submitted a consent of release to the VA. The problem arises when a potential recipient of the Conroy Scholarship is unable to have his or her veteran sponsor submit a consent of release. When consent cannot be obtained, the applicant is effectively barred from being able to receive any benefits from the scholarship.

To address the lack of a uniform process regarding the verification of eligibility for the Conroy Scholarship, HB0980 seeks to mandate the process of eligibility by using the VA's Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) program to serve as proof of eligibility for the Conroy Scholarship. The Chapter 35 DEA program allows dependents of veterans with a total and permanent service-connected disability, the same eligibility requirements as the Conroy Scholarship, to receive education benefits from the VA. In

conjunction with using the benefits awarded by the VA, this bill allows recipients of the Chapter 35 DEA program to use a certificate of eligibility (COE) to receive the Conroy Scholarship without requiring additional paperwork from their veteran sponsor. As the COE is in the applicant's name, only the VA, university, and applicant are involved in verifying eligibility for the scholarship. Second, using Chapter 35 DEA also reduces the possibility that an applicant may not be able to access the benefits because a veteran sponsor is unable or unwilling to verify their disability rating. Similarly, the veteran's privacy is better protected through the use of a VA-approved certificate of eligibility than through a form independently created by a university or private entity. Altogether, by creating a clear process for universities trying to verify eligibility for Conroy, veterans and their loved ones will be better served.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, I respectfully request a favorable report on HB0980.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Crosby', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Delegate Brian Crosby
District 29B, St. Mary's County