

# **VeteransCaucusLegislationSupportLetter\_SB772.pdf**

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Position: FAV



MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
VETERANS CAUCUS

February 12, 2025

Senator Brian Feldman, Chair  
Education, Energy & the Environment Committee  
2W Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB772, Higher Education – Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship  
Program - Eligibility

Hearing Date: March 5, 2025

Dear Chairman Feldman,

Please let this letter serve as notice of the support of the Maryland General Assembly Senate Veterans Caucus for Senate Bill 772.

After review by our respective legislative committee, the Senate Veterans Caucus believes that the above-mentioned legislation would provide a valuable benefit to the veterans of the State of Maryland and requests a favorable report.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin F. Brooks".

Senator Benjamin Brooks  
Senate Chair

cc: Senator Dawn Gile

# **SB0772\_MACC\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Drew Jabin

Position: FAV

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

March 5, 2025

**SB 772 - Higher Education - Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program – Eligibility****Position: Favorable**

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The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), representing Maryland's 16 community colleges, supports **SB 772**, which expands eligibility for the Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program to include additional dependents and surviving spouses of disabled veterans. Ensuring that more students have access to financial assistance is critical to making higher education accessible and supporting those who have sacrificed for our country.

Community colleges serve a diverse student population, including many veterans, military-connected students, and their families. Expanding financial aid to the spouses and children of veterans with disabilities removes a major obstacle for these students, helping them afford college and focus on their education. Many military families face unique challenges, and this bill provides essential support to ensure access to affordable, high-quality education at Maryland's community colleges.

Additionally, SB 772 helps streamline the scholarship process by ensuring that postsecondary institutions can verify eligibility more efficiently. This allows students to access funding without unnecessary delays. Simplifying verification ensures that eligible students receive the assistance they need to enroll, persist, and complete their education.

Investing in financial aid for military families also strengthens Maryland's workforce and economy. Many students who benefit from this scholarship will enter critical industries, contributing to a skilled workforce that meets the needs of local employers. Community colleges are committed to supporting Maryland's military community, and SB 772 is an important step toward ensuring that no eligible student is left behind due to financial barriers. Accordingly, MACC urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** vote on **SB 772**.

Please contact Brad Phillips ([bphillips@mdacc.org](mailto:bphillips@mdacc.org)) or Drew Jabin ([djabin@mdacc.org](mailto:djabin@mdacc.org)) with questions.

# **DG Written Testimony\_SB0772.docx.pdf**

Uploaded by: Senator Gile

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of SB0772 - Higher Education - Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy  
Memorial Scholarship Program - Eligibility**

Mr. Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

SB0722 would provide a mandated process for verifying eligibility for the Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program.

**Background**

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.

### **Solution**

To address the lack of a uniform process regarding the verification of eligibility for the Conroy Scholarship, SB0722 would:

- 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.
- Allow 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.

Using Chapter 35 DEA 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. Per the Fiscal Note, SB0722 would likely increase the cost of the program by an estimated \$9,200 per award, but the total cost to the state is difficult to estimate.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB0722.