

EDITH J. PATTERSON, Ed.D.

Legislative District 28
Charles County

Ways and Means Committee

Subcommittees

Local Revenues

Chair, Racing and Gaming

Chair, Southern Maryland
House Delegation



The Maryland House of Delegates
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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

**Testimony in Support of HB0600/SB0276
Educational Equity for Service Members Act**

Good afternoon, Chair Atterbeary, Vice-Chair Wilkins, and House Ways and Means Committee members. For the record, I am Delegate Edith Patterson, sponsor of HB0600/SB0276 – Educational Equity for Service Members Act.

I am proud to present this bipartisan legislation, which addresses inconsistencies in Maryland law and ensures uniform recognition and equitable benefits for all branches of the uniformed services. At present, our uniformed services include six military branches—Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy, and Space Force—and two non-military branches: the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). By aligning Maryland's definitions with federal standards, this bill ensures consistent treatment and fair access to benefits for all eight branches of the uniformed services.

This bill builds on legislation I introduced last year that updated Maryland's definition of "armed forces" to include the United States Space Force, aligning with Title 10 of the United States Code. That update reduced confusion and ensured that all eligible service members and their dependents could access the benefits they had earned. This year, we are taking further steps by incorporating the United States Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)—two vital uniformed services that serve and protect our nation both domestically and abroad.

This legislation is vital because it resolves inconsistencies in Maryland law by standardizing references to the uniformed services and ensuring equitable application of existing benefits. It is important to note that this bill does not create new policies but modernizes and clarifies existing laws to achieve the following objectives:

1. **Definitions:** Align state definitions of "uniformed services" with federal standards to include all eight branches.
2. **State and Local Boards:** Ensure uniformed service members have equitable access to benefits such as:
 - o Enrollment considerations for children of deployed service members in public schools
 - o Teacher certification pathways for service members and spouses
 - o Inclusion of all eight branches in the K-12 Purple Star School program
3. **Higher Education Institutions:** Standardize guidelines and policies to support uniformed service members, including:
 - o Priority registration

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- Tuition deferment for members called to active duty
4. **Higher Education Commission:** Provide clarity for:
- Deferment of state service obligations for members deployed outside Maryland
 - Equal access to scholarships and service-based educational benefits

This legislation is a straightforward yet impactful measure that ensures fairness and consistency for those who dedicate their lives to serving our country. By modernizing Maryland law, we recognize the invaluable contributions and sacrifices made by all uniformed service members.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote favorably on this bill to bring Maryland law into alignment with federal definitions.

Thank you for your consideration,

Edith Patterson
Charles County