



**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**Senate Bill 709**

**Education - Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program**

**April 1, 2026**

**Favorable**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill 709. The University System of Maryland (USM) is pleased to offer testimony in support of Senate Bill 709, legislation that strengthens Maryland's commitment to military-connected students by modernizing definitions within the existing Purple Star Schools Program and creating a new Purple Star Colleges Program to recognize institutions of higher education that provide exemplary support to military-connected learners.

The USM is composed of twelve distinguished institutions and three regional centers. We award eight out of every ten bachelor's degrees in the state. Each of USM's institutions has a distinct and unique approach to the mission of educating students and promoting the economic, intellectual, and cultural growth of its surrounding community. These institutions are located throughout the state, from western Maryland to the Eastern Shore, with the flagship campus in the Washington suburbs. The USM includes three Historically Black Institutions, comprehensive institutions and research universities, and the country's largest public online institution.

Senate Bill 709 updates the definition of "military-connected student" under current law and establishes a statewide framework for identifying and elevating colleges that demonstrate strong, intentional services for service members, veterans, and their families. Senate Bill 709's purpose is to ensure consistent terminology across Maryland statutes and to create a **voluntary** recognition program to highlight institutions that excel in transitioning, advising, and supporting military-connected students.

USM institutions have long served as national leaders in educating military-connected populations, and Senate Bill 709 aligns squarely with our commitment to access, success, and student-centered support. The University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) – one of the largest and most experienced military-serving universities in the world – offers globally deployed education, flexible online programs, specialized advising, and dedicated military/veteran support hubs. These services directly advance the goals of the Purple Star Colleges Program by helping active-duty service members, reservists, veterans, and dependents navigate degree pathways while managing military obligations.

Similarly, Bowie State University, Maryland's first HBCU, maintains a strong track record of supporting military-connected students through its Military Resource Center, veteran-friendly enrollment services, counseling resources, and community partnerships that ease the transition into higher education. Bowie State's culture of inclusion and service reflects exactly the type of holistic support that Senate Bill 709 aims to highlight and encourage.

The USM strongly believes that Maryland's military-connected residents enrich our campuses with diverse experiences, leadership, and commitment to public service. The creation of a statewide Purple Star Colleges designation can elevate best practices and amplify Maryland's continued leadership in honoring and supporting those who serve.

For these reasons, the University System of Maryland supports Senate Bill 709 and respectfully urges a favorable report.

