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HB 232 - MMD – National Guard – Tuition Assistance

Good afternoon, Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 232, MMD-National Guard- Tuition Assistance.

HB 232 aligns with the priorities of the Moore-Miller Administration, creating an Equitable, Robust, and Competitive Economy through providing access to vocational equipment that will have the following positive impacts:

- Reducing Maryland’s underemployment rate
- Improve labor force participation
- And Enhance financial readiness of soldiers, airmen and their families.

The statutory change would enable the Maryland Military Department (MMD) to support Servicemembers by reimbursing career-related overhead expenses. Specifically, reimbursing Servicemembers directly for approved costs incurred while enrolled in state-certified apprenticeship programs, including personal protective equipment (PPE), tools, certification or licensing fees, and trade-required equipment and materials.

HB 232 also allows for the use of existing State Tuition Assistance Reimbursement (STAR) education funding to directly support Maryland National Guard (MDNG) Servicemembers pursuing state-certified apprenticeship programs.

MMD recognizes that access to high-quality equipment, tools, and technology is essential to effective vocational training. This change to the Maryland STAR Education Program will help to:

- Provide equitable access to equipment and learning materials across all programs, ensuring that no one is disadvantaged due to lack of personal resources.

- Eliminate barriers that disproportionately impact historically marginalized communities, including financial, geographic, or physical obstacles.

- Invest in inclusive infrastructure.

- Foster a culture of respect, inclusion, and support.

The bill is revenue neutral and does not have a fiscal impact.

For these reasons, I urge the committee to issue a favorable report for HB 232. Thank you for your time and consideration.