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February 10, 2026

The Honorable Ben Barnes, Chair,
Appropriations Committee
120 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the Appropriations
Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information on House Bill 623 –
Education - Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges
Program, sponsored by Delegate Patterson. The Maryland Higher
Education Commission (MHEC) submits this letter to outline
implementation and statutory considerations related to the bill.

House Bill 623 establishes the Purple Star Colleges Program within MHEC
to recognize institutions of higher education and private career schools that
demonstrate a commitment to serving veterans, service members, and their
families. MHEC strongly supports the goal of easing transitions for
military-connected students and recognizes the value of a clear, trusted
designation that signals an institution's readiness to meet their unique
academic, financial, and support needs.

MHEC also appreciates the thoughtful expansion of the Purple Star
framework from the K–12 environment into postsecondary education.
Extending this recognition to public and private institutions, as well as
private career schools, has the potential to strengthen continuity across
Maryland's K–20 military support pipeline. At the same time,
implementation in the higher education space presents additional
considerations given the diversity of institutional missions, governance
structures, and student populations.

Under HB 623, MHEC would be responsible for developing designation
criteria, administering application and renewal processes, and ensuring
ongoing adherence to requirements related to professional development,
public-facing resources, and student transition supports. To implement the
program with the consistency, rigor, and credibility envisioned by the
legislation, MHEC has identified a need for dedicated staffing capacity.

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MHEC's current staffing levels are fully committed to existing statutory, regulatory, and financial aid responsibilities. Successful implementation of the Purple Star Colleges Program would require:

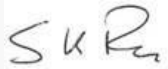
- A Director to lead program development, ensure regulatory alignment, and oversee the designation and renewal process; and
- A Technical Assistance and Outreach Specialist to serve as a liaison to campus military-connected coordinators and to develop and deliver the statewide professional development resources required under the bill.

MHEC currently supports veterans and service members through its State Approving Agency (SAA), which operates under a federally mandated contract with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In the most recent fiscal year, the SAA provided oversight to more than 400 postsecondary institutions statewide to ensure programs meet federal requirements for GI Bill® eligibility. This work is highly technical, compliance-driven, and narrowly defined by federal statute.

Because the administration of the Purple Star Colleges Program falls outside the scope of the SAA's federal contract, and given the intensity of the SAA's existing responsibilities, those functions cannot be absorbed within current resources. Dedicated, state-funded staff would be necessary to ensure the Purple Star designation remains meaningful, sustainable, and trusted by students and institutions alike.

The Purple Star Colleges Program has the potential to serve as an important tool for military-connected students navigating Maryland's postsecondary landscape. MHEC looks forward to the continued collaboration to ensure the program is implemented in a way that upholds its intent and long-term success.

Yours in Service,



Sanjay Rai, Ph.D.
Secretary
Maryland Higher Education Commission