

**SB207\_USM\_FAV\_XAPP.pdf**

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**HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**Senate Bill 207**  
**Higher Education – Guaranteed Access Grant Program - Applicability**  
**March 25, 2026**  
**Favorable**

Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Kaiser, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bill 207. This bill proposes to delay the decentralization of the Guaranteed Access Grant Program until the 2029-2030 financial aid award year. The University System of Maryland (USM) urges a favorable report on this bill.

The USM is comprised 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 12 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. This bill is important to all USM institutions that accept undergraduate students.

Delay of the implementation year provides more time for collaborative efforts to shape a clear and sensible Guaranteed Access Grant program process that better addresses student and State needs and institutional capacity. The Commission's Financial Aid Advisory Council includes representatives from all higher education segments and has a role in working with the State Department of Education on district outreach. That group's charge to provide counsel on matters of policy could be a good vehicle for working towards a new process that helps to award student aid sooner and more predictably.

Thank you for considering our position that the proposed delay is beneficial to our students, our institutions, and to our State's desire to help students receive clear and timely information about their student financial assistance so they may plan their education.



UNIVERSITY SYSTEM  
of MARYLAND



**XSB0207\_MACC\_FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Drew Jabin

Position: FAV

**House Appropriations Committee**

March 25, 2026

**SB 207 - Higher Education - Guaranteed Access Grant Program - Applicability****Position: Favorable**

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The Maryland Association of Community Colleges (MACC), representing Maryland's 16 community colleges, supports **SB 207**. This bill delays the planned decentralization of the Guaranteed Access Grant Program until the 2029–2030 financial aid award year, allowing the State to maintain the current statewide administration of the program during a period of significant transition in financial aid policy and systems.

Maryland's community colleges primarily serve students who receive Educational Assistance Grants rather than Guaranteed Access Grants; however, MACC strongly supports policies that promote stability and accuracy across the State's financial aid programs. Maintaining a centralized process for the Guaranteed Access Grant Program ensures consistent eligibility determinations, reduces the risk of administrative errors, and helps prevent delays in award notifications for low-income students who depend on timely financial aid decisions.

In addition, by delaying decentralization, SB 207 provides the State with an important opportunity to evaluate how financial aid resources are allocated across need-based programs, including the balance between Guaranteed Access Grants and Educational Assistance Grants. This additional time could support thoughtful consideration of more equitable and effective approaches to distributing aid so that students at both two-year and four-year institutions are adequately served.

By preserving the existing structure of the Guaranteed Access Grant Program as federal and State financial aid systems continue to evolve, SB 207 provides needed operational certainty for institutions and protects students from unintended disruptions in aid delivery. MACC appreciates the Maryland Higher Education Commission's efforts to prioritize program stability and long-term effectiveness. Accordingly, MACC urges the Committee to issue a **FAVORABLE** vote on **SB 207**.

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

**SB 207\_ HB 231 FAV.pdf**

Uploaded by: Meghan Music

Position: FAV



March 25, 2026

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

The Honorable Melissa Wells  
Chair, Government, Labor, and Elections Committee  
145 Lowe House Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Chairman Barnes, Chair Wells, and the Honorable Members of the Appropriations and Government, Labor, and Elections Committees,

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 207 – Higher Education – Guaranteed Access Grant Program – Applicability.

SB 207 is crossfiled with HB 231. HB 231 passed unanimously through both committees without amendment and the House (136 - 0). SB 207 is in the same posture as HB 231, having passed unanimously out of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee and the Senate (43-0).

SB 207 is MHEC's departmental legislation and is necessary to ensure the continued, orderly administration of the Guaranteed Access Grant (GA) Program, Maryland's highest-need, last-dollar financial aid program for low-income undergraduate students. The bill delays the implementation of statutory provisions until the 2029-2030 school year, which would decentralize certain GA Grant administrative functions to institutions of higher education, allowing additional time for system readiness and stakeholder coordination.

### **Legislative Background and Implementation History**

The statutory framework for decentralizing components of the Guaranteed Access Grant program was most recently advanced through **House Bill 923 of the 2023 legislative session**, which established a timeline for transitioning certain GA Grant administrative functions to institutions of higher education. The policy rationale for decentralization is sound: institutions

are best positioned to administer the program because they possess real-time information on student enrollment, academic progress, cost of attendance, and continued eligibility, information that is critical to accurately awarding and maintaining need-based aid.

While MHEC was operationally prepared to support the implementation of decentralization, institutions of higher education indicated that they were not ready to assume these responsibilities within the statutory timeline. As a result, and with the approval of Secretary Sanjay Rai, MHEC paused implementation to avoid disruption to students and institutions. That pause contributed to delays in awarding Guaranteed Access Grants during FY 2025, underscoring the importance of aligning statutory timelines with institutional readiness.

As the State approached FY 2026, institutions again communicated that they were not prepared to move forward with decentralized administration, particularly in light of significant changes in the administration of federal student aid programs that would impact the ability to provide state and institution-based aid for students. In response, MHEC elevated these concerns to the Governor's Office to ensure that the General Assembly was informed of the operational realities facing institutions and to avoid further disruption to students who rely on GA Grants to enroll and persist in higher education.

### **Why Senate Bill 207 Is Necessary**

Proceeding with decentralization before these issues are fully resolved risks delays, inconsistencies, and administrative errors that could directly impact students who rely on GA Grants to enroll in and persist through higher education. Senate Bill 207 does **not** expand eligibility, reduce award amounts, or alter student-facing benefits. Students will continue to receive Guaranteed Access Grant awards under the current centralized model during the delay period, ensuring continuity and stability.

### **Commitment to Collaboration and Long-Term Policy Goals**

Given the current federal financial aid landscape, significantly altered by recent federal laws and regulations that remain under development, MHEC is fully committed to working in close partnership with Maryland's institutions of higher education as the State prepares for decentralization. This includes engaging institutions on operational planning, developing clear guidance and timelines, aligning systems and data processes, and supporting training and capacity-building efforts.

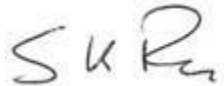
Decentralization of the Guaranteed Access Grant program remains an important long-term policy goal. Institutions are uniquely positioned to administer GA Grants effectively because they have direct access to enrollment verification, academic standing, changes in student status, and cost-of-attendance data. When implemented correctly, decentralization can improve accuracy,

reduce delays, and better align awards with students' actual eligibility throughout the academic year.

The delay provided by Senate Bill 207 will allow MHEC and institutions to proceed deliberately and collaboratively, ensuring that decentralization is implemented in a manner that is consistent, transparent, and protective of students. MHEC views this period not as a pause in progress, but as an opportunity to strengthen coordination and readiness so that the transition achieves its intended outcomes.

For these reasons, the Maryland Higher Education Commission respectfully requests a favorable report on Senate Bill 207. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Meghan Music, Executive Director of External and Legislative Relations.

Yours in Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S K Rai". The letters are cursive and somewhat stylized.

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