

SB207_USM_FAV.pdf

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SENATE EDUCATION, ENERGY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Senate Bill 207

Higher Education – Guaranteed Access Grant Program - Applicability

January 28, 2026

Favorable

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, 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 well-advised 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



SB 207_GA_MICUA Testimony FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Beatrix Peck

Position: FAV



Support

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Senate Bill 207 (Feldman)
Higher Education – Guaranteed Access Grant Program - Applicability
Matt Power, President
mpower@micua.org
January 28, 2026

On behalf of Maryland's independent colleges and universities and the more than 56,000 students we serve, thank you for the opportunity to provide a letter of support regarding **[SB 207 \(Feldman\) Higher Education – Guaranteed Access Grant Program - Applicability](#)**, which delays the decentralization of the Guaranteed Access Grant Program until the 2029-2030 financial aid award year. This bill is a crucial step in ensuring the continued success of the Guaranteed Access Grant Program, a vital source of financial aid for Maryland's neediest students.

As the Committee may recall, the passage of HB 923 in the 2023 Session was a significant milestone for the Guaranteed Access Grant Program. The bill laid the groundwork for a decentralized program, preserving the Maryland Higher Education Commission's certifying role while allowing institutions of higher education to play a more active role in administering the grants. However, the bill also recognized the need for a phased implementation to ensure a smooth transition.

The Guaranteed Access Grant Program has been a cornerstone of Maryland's efforts to make higher education more accessible and affordable for low-income students. The Program provides critical funding to students who might otherwise be unable to pursue their academic goals. By providing a guaranteed source of funding, the Program helps to level the playing field and promote economic mobility.

MICUA strongly supports the Guaranteed Access Grant Program and believes that it is essential to the State's efforts to promote college access and affordability. The Program has a proven track record of success, and its continuation is vital to ensure that Maryland's neediest students have access to the resources they need to succeed in an effective and timely manner.

As the State moves forward with the decentralization of the Guaranteed Access Grant Program, MICUA encourages MHEC to coordinate with the Financial Assistance Advisory Council and the Segmental Advisory Council to develop policies and procedures that will ensure the successful implementation of the Program. This collaboration will be critical in addressing any challenges that may arise during the transition and ensuring that the Program continues to serve the needs of Maryland's students.

We look forward to working with MHEC and other stakeholders to ensure that the Program is implemented in a way that benefits Maryland's neediest students. Thank you for considering our testimony.

SB0207_MACC_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Drew Jabin

Position: FAV

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
January 28, 2026

SB 207 - Higher Education - Guaranteed Access Grant Program - Applicability

Position: Favorable

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) or Drew Jabin (djabin@mdacc.org) with questions.

SB207. MHEC. Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Sanjay Rai

Position: FAV



January 28, 2026

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair,
Education, Energy, and Environment Committee
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Annapolis, Maryland 21401

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Lt. Governor

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Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee,

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

Senate Bill 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.

While MHEC was operationally prepared to support the implementation of decentralization in FY 2025, 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.

As the State approached FY 2026, institutions again communicated that they were not prepared to move forward with decentralized administration, particularly in the 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.

MARYLAND HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION

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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

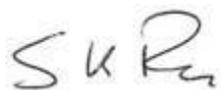
Given the current federal financial aid landscape, significantly altered by recent federal laws and regulations that remain under development, MHEC is fully committed to working in close partnership with Maryland's institutions of higher education as the State prepares for decentralization. This includes 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,



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

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