

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 273 (Senator Gile)
Education, Energy, and the Environment

Higher Education - Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship
Program - Eligibility

This bill expands eligibility for the Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program to include a resident of Maryland at the time of the disabling or fatal event who is or was eligible for the Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) benefit at the time of application as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The bill also authorizes applicants to submit a copy of the applicant's certificate of eligibility DEA benefits to verify eligibility with a postsecondary institution. In cases where an applicant is unable to obtain a certificate of eligibility, the bill authorizes a school certifying official or institutional liaison to verify the applicant's DEA status. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Although the number of additional awards made under the bill cannot be reliably estimated, to the extent additional individuals receive a Conroy scholarship under the bill, general fund expenditures and Edward T. Conroy and Jean B. Cryor Scholarship Fund special fund revenues and expenditures may increase by an estimated \$4,600 per award annually beginning FY 2027, as discussed below. Public institutions of higher education may realize operational efficiencies to the extent Chapter 35 DEA certificates streamline the verification process. The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) can update eligibility requirements using existing resources. **This bill may increase the cost of an entitlement program beginning in FY 2027.**

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law:

The Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program

The Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program makes awards to specified public safety personnel and their eligible dependents to attend an eligible postsecondary institution in the State for five years of full-time study or eight years of part-time study. The Jean B. Cryor Memorial Scholarship Program makes the same type of financial assistance available to the child or surviving spouse of a public or nonpublic school employee who, as a result of an act of violence, died in the line of duty or is 100% disabled due to an injury sustained in the line of duty. There is an Edward T. Conroy and Jean B. Cryor Scholarship Fund. Chapter 23 of 2022 mandates at least \$4.0 million in funding for the Edward T. Conroy and Jean B. Cryor Scholarship Fund beginning in fiscal 2024.

Scholarships may be used at private or public four-year institutions, community colleges, or private career schools and they may be used for undergraduate or graduate study. Under current law, to apply for a Conroy or a Cryor scholarship, the following individuals are required to be a resident of Maryland at the time of application or the disabling or fatal event:

- the child or surviving spouse of a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who, after December 7, 1941, died or suffered a service-connected 100% permanent disability;
- the child or surviving spouse of a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who was declared to be a prisoner of war or missing in action as a result of the Vietnam conflict;
- an individual who was a prisoner of war as a result of the Vietnam conflict;
- a veteran who suffers a service-connected disability of 25% or greater and has exhausted all federal veterans' educational benefits;
- the child or surviving spouse of a victim of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks; and
- the child or surviving spouse of a school employee who, as a result of violence, died in the line of duty or suffered a 100% permanent disability in the line of duty.

Individuals who are not required to be a resident of Maryland at the time of application or the disabling or fatal events under current law include (1) the child or surviving spouse of any State or local public safety officer killed in the line of duty; (2) a disabled public safety employee; or (3) the child or surviving spouse of a disabled public safety employee who sustains an injury in the line of duty that renders the public safety employee 100% disabled.

To be eligible, an applicant also must be accepted for admission or enrolled in the regular undergraduate, graduate, or professional program at an eligible institution or be enrolled in a two-year terminal certificate program in which the course work is acceptable for transfer credit for an accredited baccalaureate program.

Postsecondary institutions include public, private nonprofit, and for-profit institutions of higher education, as well as private career schools. Prior to Chapter 23, which specified the eligibility of private career schools in statute, private career schools were not necessarily considered eligible institutions due to other parameters of the scholarship programs. Postsecondary institutions verify eligibility and award the scholarships to eligible students. In October and February of each year, each postsecondary institution reports to MHEC the number of students eligible for a Conroy or a Cryor scholarship. After verifying the number of eligible students for both programs, MHEC allocates the funds for awards to the postsecondary institutions. If funds cannot be allocated in the fiscal year in which awards are made, priority must be given to allocating funds for those awards in the following fiscal year.

Awards are subject to both a ceiling and a floor. They may not exceed the equivalent annual tuition and mandatory fees of a full-time undergraduate Maryland resident at a four-year institution within the University System of Maryland (USM) – other than the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus (UMB) and the University of Maryland Global Campus (UMGC) – with the highest annual expenses for a full-time resident undergraduate. They may not be less than either \$3,000 or the equivalent annual tuition and mandatory fees of a resident of the institution attended by the recipient of the scholarship, whichever is the least.

Each recipient may hold the award for five years of full-time study or eight years of part-time study. No more than 15 eligible recipients of a scholarship may be veterans who suffer a service-connected disability of 25% or greater and have exhausted or are no longer eligible for federal veterans' educational benefits.

Chapter 35 Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Survivors' Chapter 35 DEA Program provides financial support for the education and training of the child or spouse of a veteran or service member who has died, is captured or missing, or is permanently and totally disabled due to a service-connected disability. To qualify, you must be the child or spouse of:

- a veteran who died or is permanently disabled due to a service-connected disability;
- a service member who died in the line of duty;
- a service member who is missing in action or was captured in the line of duty for more than 90 days;

- a service member who was forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty for more than 90 days; or
- a service member who is in the hospital or getting outpatient treatment for a service-connected permanent and total disability who is likely to be discharged.

State Fiscal Effect: In fiscal 2025, 2,046 scholarships were awarded under the Edward T. and Mary A. Conroy Memorial Scholarship Program, representing almost \$9.5 million in funding. Therefore, each additional award recipient may increase expenditures by an estimated \$4,600 per award annually beginning fiscal 2027, based on current scholarship awards. However, each scholarship award may be up to the tuition and mandatory fees of a full-time undergraduate Maryland resident at the four-year public institution with the highest annual expenses for a full-time resident undergraduate within USM, other than UMB and UMGC.

Chapter 23 mandates at least \$4.0 million for the Edward T. Conroy and Jean B. Cryor Scholarship Fund beginning in fiscal 2024; even so, funding still must be allocated based on the number of eligible individuals and can exceed the mandated \$4.0 million. The fiscal 2027 budget as introduced includes \$7.0 million for the Edward T. Conroy and Jean B. Cryor Scholarship Fund.

Although the requirements for Chapter 35 DEA and Conroy scholarships are very similar, expanding eligibility to include individuals eligible for Chapter 35 DEA may increase the number of annual award recipients beginning in fiscal 2027.

Additionally, there may be individuals who are eligible for a Conroy scholarship under current law but are unable to verify eligibility via authorized means under current law. Expanding verification procedures to allow individuals to verify eligibility through Chapter 35 DEA certificates may therefore also increase the number of annual award recipients. These additional awards likely cannot be absorbed by existing appropriations to the program as MHEC advises the program is already on track to exceed the currently appropriated \$7.0 million in funds for fiscal 2026. Further, MHEC anticipates that the substantial growth of the program in recent years is likely to continue through fiscal 2031 due to unmet demand from prior fiscal years and increased awareness of the program.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has been introduced within the last three years. See SB 772 and HB 980 of 2025.

Designated Cross File: HB 100 (Delegate Crosby) - Appropriations.

Information Source(s): Maryland Higher Education Commission; Maryland Independent College and University Association; Morgan State University; St. Mary's College of Maryland; University System of Maryland; Department of Legislative Services

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