

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2026 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

Senate Bill 709 (Senator Carozza, *et al.*)
 Education, Energy, and the Environment

Education - Purple Star Schools Program and Purple Star Colleges Program

This bill establishes the Purple Star Colleges Program administered by the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) to recognize colleges, including private career schools, that provide strong services and support for military-connected students. To qualify, a college must, at a minimum, designate a staff liaison to perform specified duties, create an easily accessible web page with pertinent resources, maintain a transition program led by students as appropriate, and offer professional development for staff on issues related to military-connected students transferring to new schools. The bill also changes the definition of “military-connected student” for purposes of the Purple Star Schools Program. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2026.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: MHEC general fund expenditures increase by \$43,800 and \$46,400 in FY 2027 and 2028, respectively, for contractual personnel, as discussed below. If a public four-year institution of higher education or Baltimore City Community College elects to seek Purple Star College designation, higher education expenditures may increase and operations may be affected; however, any such impacts are voluntary and likely absorbable. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) can update regulations for the Purple Star Schools Program with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	43,800	46,400	0	0	0
Net Effect	(\$43,800)	(\$46,400)	\$0	\$0	\$0

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: If a local community college elects to seek Purple Star College designation, expenditures may increase and operations may be affected; however, any such impacts are voluntary and likely absorbable. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: MHEC must designate a college as a Purple Star College if the college applies and meets the specific criteria adopted by MHEC (in consultation with the Maryland College Collaboration for Student Veterans Commission). A college may partner with its governing board to meet the criteria. MHEC (again in consultation with the Maryland College Collaboration for Student Veterans Commission) must adopt regulations to implement the bill.

The liaison's duties must include (1) identifying newly enrolled military-connected students; (2) serving as the point of contact between the college and newly enrolled military-connected students; (3) determining appropriate college services available to newly enrolled military-connected students; (4) assisting in coordinating college programs for newly enrolled military-connected students; and (5) generally assisting in a military-connected student's transition to a new college.

The web page required for recognition as a Purple Star College must include information regarding (1) relocation to, enrollment at, registration at, and transferring records to the college; (2) academic planning, course sequences, and advanced courses available at the college; and (3) counseling and other support services available for military-connected students transitioning into the college.

For purposes of the Purple Star Colleges Program, the bill defines "military-connected student" as a service member, a veteran, or the dependent of a service member or veteran. For the purposes of the Purple Stars Schools Program "military-connected student" is a student who is a dependent of a service member or a service member who was killed in the line of duty.

Current Law:

Purple Star Schools Program

Chapters 65 and 66 of 2022 established the Purple Star Schools Program to recognize public schools that provide strong services and support for military-connected students and their families when students transfer schools as a result of a parent or guardian's military service. To qualify as a Purple Star School, a public school must meet criteria adopted by MSDE. At a minimum, the criteria must require a school to designate a staff liaison to perform specified duties, create an easily accessible web page with pertinent resources, maintain a transition program led by students, and offer professional development for staff on issues related to military-connected students transferring to new schools. A public school may partner with the county board to fulfill MSDE's criteria.

For purposes of the Purple Star Schools Program, “military-connected student” means a student who is a dependent of (1) an active duty uniformed services member; (2) a member of a reserve component; or (3) an active duty uniformed services member or a member of a reserve component who was killed in the line of duty.

Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children

Since 2010, Maryland has been a member of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children, which addresses enrollment of dependents of members of the uniformed services when the service member is under active orders. The purpose of the compact is to remove barriers to educational success imposed on children of military families because of frequent moves and deployment by their parents. Among other things, it seeks to (1) facilitate the timely enrollment of children of military families and (2) facilitate the student placement process.

State Fiscal Effect: MHEC estimates that two regular full-time positions are needed beginning in fiscal 2027 to implement the bill, including (1) a program manager to establish regulations, regularly review institutional applications, coordinate with other State agencies, and generate reports and (2) a technical assistance and outreach specialist to coordinate with institutions, create and deliver professional development, provide technical support, curate resources, and engage additional stakeholders. The Department of Legislative Services (DLS), however, advises that the bill merely requires MHEC to establish criteria and certify institutions as Purple Star Colleges as they apply. The onus of responsibility for providing services that would qualify institutions as Purple Star Colleges is on the institutions themselves. Therefore, DLS advises that MHEC can likely establish and manage the Purple Star Colleges Program using only one contractual half-time (50%) program manager.

General fund expenditures for MHEC increase by \$43,821 in fiscal 2027, which accounts for a 90-day start-up delay from the bill’s July 1, 2026 effective date. This estimate reflects the cost of hiring one contractual half-time (50%) program manager to establish the Purple Star Colleges Program, including criteria for qualification as a Purple Star College, development of application materials, and promulgation of regulations. It includes a half-time (50%) salary, fringe benefits, one-time start-up costs, and ongoing operating expenses.

Contractual Position	0.5
Salary and Fringe Benefits	\$35,722
Operating Expenses	<u>8,099</u>
Total FY 2027 MHEC Expenditures	\$43,821

Fiscal 2028 expenditures reflect a half-time (50%) salary with an annual increase and employee turnover as well as increases in ongoing operating expenses. This analysis assumes that the position terminates on June 30, 2028. After that time, it is assumed that MHEC can more readily absorb any ongoing responsibilities under the bill, such as reviewing applications. This analysis does not reflect the costs of ongoing stakeholder coordination, expanded technical assistance, or detailed reporting on program implementation.

This estimate does not include any health insurance costs that could be incurred for specified contractual employees under the State's implementation of the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

Small Business Effect: If an independent institution of higher education, including a private career school, wishes to be recognized as a Purple Star College, expenditures may increase and operations may be affected to achieve such recognition. However, any expenditure increases or operational changes can likely be managed with existing resources.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 623 (Delegate Patterson, *et al.*) - Appropriations.

Information Source(s): Baltimore City Community College; Department of Veterans and Military Families; Maryland Higher Education Commission; Maryland State Department of Education; Morgan State University; University System of Maryland; Maryland Independent College and University Association; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 9, 2026
sj/clb

Analysis by: Michael E. Sousane

Direct Inquiries to:

(410) 946-5510

(301) 970-5510