

May 22, 2012

The Honorable Thomas V. Mike Miller, Jr.
President of the Senate
H-107 State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Mr. President:

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, today I have vetoed Senate Bill 365 – *Higher Education – The Charles W. Riley Fire and Emergency Medical Services Scholarship*.

Senate Bill 365 repeals the Charles W. Riley Fire and Emergency Medical Services Tuition Reimbursement Program (Reimbursement Program) and creates the Charles W. Riley Fire and Emergency Medical Services Scholarship Program (Scholarship Program). The bill, which would take effect July 1, 2012, provides that any funds remaining in the Reimbursement Program after June 30, 2013 are to be used to fund the Scholarship Program for the 2013–2014 academic year.

Because the bill would repeal the Reimbursement Program effective July 1, 2012 without properly phasing out the program, individuals anticipating reimbursement payments for courses taken during the 2010–2011 and 2011–2012 academic years would not receive reimbursement for those courses. In fact, under the bill as passed by the General Assembly, courses taken during three academic years (2010–2011, 2011–2012, and 2012–2013) would not be eligible for either the Reimbursement Program or the Scholarship Program. In light of the implementation issues, and after consultation with the bill's sponsors, I believe it is best to veto the bill and revisit the matter next session.

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), which administers the Reimbursement Program, uses funds appropriated in one fiscal year to reimburse eligible students for tuition costs incurred two years earlier. Funds that were appropriated for the Reimbursement Program for fiscal 2013, therefore, will be used to reimburse tuition costs incurred during the 2010–2011 academic year. Senate Bill 365, however, would repeal the Reimbursement Program effective July 1, 2012, meaning that there would be no authorization to provide tuition reimbursements in fiscal 2013 and subsequent fiscal years. As a result, individuals who took courses during the

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2010–2011 and 2011–2012 academic years anticipating reimbursement would not receive reimbursement for those courses. Moreover, scholarships would not be awarded under the new Scholarship Program until the 2013–2014 academic year, resulting in a three–year period during which firefighters and rescue workers would not receive tuition reimbursement or scholarships.

While I support the general intent of Senate Bill 365 – to provide scholarships for career and volunteer firefighters and rescue workers in the State – there are significant implementation issues caused by the manner in which the bill repeals the Reimbursement Program. During the 2013 session, I encourage the General Assembly to consider legislation that is consistent with the intent of Senate Bill 365 but provides for a proper phase–out of the Reimbursement Program.

For the above reasons, I have today vetoed Senate Bill 365.

Sincerely,

Governor