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For Immediate Release

MHEC Protects Maryland Students Impacted by U.S. Department of Education's De-recognition of ACICS Accredited Schools

BALTIMORE, Maryland – (December 13, 2016) – The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) terminated its recognition of the Accrediting Council for Independent Colleges and Schools (ACICS) on December 12, 2016. There are several ACICS-accredited institutions of postsecondary education currently operating within Maryland, including Brightwood College - Beltsville, Brightwood College - Towson, Brightwood College - Baltimore, Fortis College, and Stratford University Baltimore Campus. There are additional institutions with ACICS accreditation that provide distance or online education to Maryland residents.

"The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) is working with all institutions to ensure that Maryland students are not immediately adversely impacted by this decision," said James D. Fielder, Jr., PhD, Maryland Higher Education Commission Secretary.

The USDOE intends to exercise discretion to provisionally certify ACICS-accredited institutions for continued participation in the federal student aid programs for up to 18 months for institutions currently accredited and in good standing with ACICS. The USDOE published federal requirements for institutions with ACICS accreditation (<http://www2.ed.gov/documents/acics/ppa-provisions.pdf>).

Provided that an institution promptly, and in good faith, seeks accreditation from another accrediting body recognized by USDOE and communicates its plans with MHEC, Secretary Fielder does not intend to withdraw that institution's authority to serve Maryland students. Several of the impacted institutions in Maryland are already actively seeking alternative accreditation. The combined actions of Secretary Fielder and the USDOE mean that affected schools in Maryland will remain open and that students will retain their eligibility for Title IV funding and education benefits administered by the Department of Veteran Affairs.

Furthermore, MHEC has been proactive in anticipating the effects of ACICS's de-recognition. After Commission approval in October, MHEC published in the Maryland Register proposed regulations that would specifically address the situation in which an accrediting body loses its recognition from USDOE. Once those regulations take effect, institutions whose accreditors are de-recognized by USDOE will have 60 days in which to apply to another accrediting body recognized by the USDOE, and four years in which to obtain accreditation from the new accrediting body.

MHEC continues to support Maryland students by ensuring that institutions remain in compliance with State and federal law. Maryland students with questions can call their institutions directly or contact MHEC at [\(800\) 974-0203](tel:8009740203) (toll free). Additional information can be found on the MHEC website www.mhec.maryland.gov/.

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