



Larry Hogan
Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford
Lt. Governor

Ian D. MacFarlane
Chair

James D. Fielder, Jr., Ph. D.
Secretary

March 30, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

The Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA), recognizes the impact that the COVID-19 Pandemic has had on Maryland post-secondary institutions. Therefore, MHEC has drafted the following guidance for all Maryland postsecondary institutions to follow that participate in our State financial aid programs.

Enrollment Changes

Postsecondary institutions must adhere to MHEC policies as it pertains to any State financial aid recipient that drops a class. Should a student drop a class before the census date, the student is then considered to **not** have been enrolled in that class. If the student's enrollment does **not** meet the minimum number of required credits for their award without that class, then the student is ineligible for that award. Therefore, the institution must cancel the award and the funds must be returned to MHEC.

Below is additional guidance pertaining to student eligibility regarding withdrawal(s) from coursework:

- If a student withdraws from a class after the institution's census date, and is charged tuition for that class, then they **may** keep the award if they meet all other credit and program requirements.
- If a student withdraws from all classes after the census date, but is still charged full-time tuition (or the tuition required to receive the funds), then they may keep the award.
- Institutions should not include State awards in R2T4 calculations.
- If a student withdraws from all classes and the student is no longer charged full-time tuition (or tuition required to receive the funds), then they are no longer eligible for their MHEC award.

Refunds of Room & Board and Tuition Charges

The U.S. Department of Education has informed postsecondary institutions that as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, if an institution elects to provide a refund or waiver of expenses for all or part of a student's tuition, fees, room and board charges, or other institutional charges, or if the

institution become aware that a student has moved off campus for the remainder of the term, the Department will not require a reevaluation of the student's cost of attendance. Therefore, the institution is not required to make changes to a student's Title IV awards on the basis of such changes.

For State financial aid programs, if an institution elects to refund a student's room and board or tuition charges, any generated credit from state financial aid is to be issued to the student and not returned to MHEC.

Independent Audit Reviews

The deadline of June 1, 2020 for post-secondary institutions to submit their Independent Audits in the Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Awards Program for the 2018-2019 academic year, has been extended to **September 15, 2020**.

2019-2020 Certification & Request Payment Process

For the 2019-2020 academic year the deadline of May 15, 2020 for institutions to certify and request payment for the various State aid programs has been extended to **June 1, 2020. This is a hard deadline.**

2020-2021 State Financial Aid Deadlines

Due to the recent announcement by State Superintendent Dr. Karen Salmon concerning that Maryland K-12 schools remaining closed until April 24, 2020, MHEC will further extend the deadline date for the 2020-2021 Guaranteed Access Grant award program to **June 1, 2020**.

MHEC is in the process of notifying all potentially eligible applicants of the new deadline, and the MHEC website will be updated to reflect the new deadline. All applicants will be notified that they have the option to submit their documentation to MHEC by email, given that applicants may not be able to utilize the postal service and place their documentation in the mail.

Also, due to the extended deadline in the Guaranteed Access Grant Award Program, MHEC will not perform initial awarding for the 2020-2021 academic year in the Howard P. Rawlings Educational Excellence Awards Program until late July 2020.

It is important to note that the deadline date of June 15, 2020 for the Promise program will not be extended. As well as the State deadline of March 1 for students to complete the FAFSA or MSFAA for consideration of various State aid programs.

Moreover, MHEC will not launch the 2020-2021 application cycle for other State aid programs such as the *Near Completer Grant*; *Cybersecurity Public Service Scholarship*; *Charles W. Riley Scholarship*; *Teaching Fellows for Maryland Scholarship*; and *Richard W. Collins III Leadership with Honor Scholarship* Programs until May 1, 2020. Institutions will be notified by email when the application cycle has launched.

During these unprecedented times MHEC remains committed to servicing both our students and institutions and will continue to make adjustments with regards to State deadlines and processes when warranted, as we continue to navigate through the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

If you have any questions, please contact Director of Student Financial Assistance Donna Thomas at donnae.thomas@maryland.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James D. Fielder". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Dr. James D. Fielder
Secretary