

SENATE MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO **SENATE, No. 3785**

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: NOVEMBER 15, 2021

The Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 3785 and with committee amendments.

This bill creates a Purple Star Schools Program in the Department of Education. Under the program, the Commissioner of Education will annually recognize as Purple Star Schools those public and nonpublic schools that provide for, or have made significant progress to respond to, the educational and social-emotional challenges military-connected students encounter during the transition to a new school when the student's parent or guardian is an active duty member of the United States Armed Forces and is relocated due to the active duty member's continued military service.

Under the bill, a Purple Star School will be designated as such if it provides programs and services that include, but need not be limited to, the following:

- (1) training for faculty and staff members to ease entry into the new school environment for military-connected students;
- (2) student-led programs to help create social connections, including an emphasis on programs for students who arrive mid-year and miss out on the normal cycles of sports and club activities;
- (3) a military family webpage on the school website to inform parents and guardians about programs and services;
- (4) relevant professional development opportunities for additional school staff; and
- (5) holding school-wide military recognition events that raise awareness and recognize the value of military service.

As amended, the bill also requires the commissioner to establish a Purple Star Schools Working Group. The purpose of the working group is to develop criteria to be used in the designation of public and nonpublic schools as Purple Star Schools. The working group will consist of members appointed by the commissioner and will be composed of: a school principal; a school administrator; a school board member; an elementary school teacher; a middle school teacher; a high school teacher; a school counselor; a school social worker; and a school psychologist.

The criteria established by the working group for a Purple Star Schools designation will include, but need not be limited to, the school's efforts to:

- (1) raise awareness and recognize the value of military service, including the sacrifices of military-connected families;
- (2) respond to the unique educational and social-emotional challenges of military-connected students;
- (3) highlight and promote equity, inclusion, and belonging;
- (4) create safe, welcoming, and inclusive environments for all students, faculty, and staff;
- (5) provide teachers, faculty, and staff with opportunities for instruction in easing the entry into the new school environment for military-connected students; and
- (6) provide the programs and services necessary to ensure that staff can manage the challenges military-connected students encounter, as enumerated by the bill.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS

The committee amended the bill to add a school board member to the list of persons to be appointed by the Commissioner of Education as part of the Purple Star Schools Working Group.