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## COALITION FOR MILITARY-CONNECTED STUDENT SUCCESS OPPOSES NEW BILL ON EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. (May 16, 2019) – The Coalition for Military-Connected Student Success, an advisory group of organizations working to ensure military-connected students have the best educational opportunities possible, opposes H.R. 1605/S. 695, *The Education Savings Accounts for Military Families Act of 2019*. This legislation would create a new national voucher program for children of active duty service members. It places the program within Impact Aid, a vital source of funding for school districts that include federal property such as military installations. This bill puts Impact Aid and other education programs integral to the education of military-connected children at risk.

The typical military family moves every two to three years. Service members worry about the effect these frequent moves have on their children's academic outcomes. They struggle to support their children as they adjust to new schools – with new teachers, new classmates, and often new curricula. The challenges faced by military-connected children are real. They demand thoughtful, well-considered bipartisan solutions from policymakers at all levels. Instead, H.R.1605/S. 695 would divert much-needed funds from public schools serving the majority of military-connected children.

In addition to Impact Aid, military-connected children are served by a broad array of federally funded education programs – from Head Start preschools to afterschool programs and services provided using Title I and Title IV funds. Cutting these to pay for a voucher program would hurt more military-connected children than it would help. Additionally, the bill grants the Secretary of Education broad authority to transfer funds out of any other Department of Education line item in order to support the military student vouchers, further jeopardizing Impact Aid and other critical programs.

We also have concerns for the military families who opt into the voucher program. Unlike public schools, the private entities that would receive funds through the ESA program are not subject to the requirements of the Military Interstate Children's Compact, an agreement adopted by all 50 states and the District of Columbia that addresses some of the most common transition-related challenges faced by military-connected children. Students whose families opt into the ESA program would waive their right to a public education and lose protections provided by the compact, including support for credit transfer, graduation requirements, and course placement.

The legislation also does not propose any accountability standards for the schools or services it would fund. It introduces a new online marketplace ostensibly to combat fraud and abuse, but this new bureaucratic entity would not ensure quality – the only requirement to be featured on the marketplace is that a company be licensed in the state where it operates. We question the ability of the U.S. Department of Education to provide effective oversight and ensure military families are not targeted by unscrupulous actors. We have firsthand experience of this, having seen far too many veterans lose their education benefits to low-quality or fraudulent schools. We also note that private schools receiving these federally funded vouchers would be free to refuse students based on gender, sexuality, religious beliefs, or even special education needs.

Ensuring that more than a million highly-mobile military children receive a high-quality education that meets their needs is no easy task. The challenges are real and so is the need for solutions that are thoughtful and nonpartisan. We urge Congress to move cautiously and consider carefully before defunding critical programs to create an untested voucher program. The education of military-connected kids – and really, all children – is too important to risk.

For more information, visit [militaryconnectedstudents.org](http://militaryconnectedstudents.org)

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