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LINDA L. SINGH  
MAJOR GENERAL  
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28 September 2016

The Honorable Edward J. Kasemeyer  
Chair Budget and Taxation Committee  
3 West Miller Senate Building  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Maggie McIntosh  
Chair House Appropriations Committee  
121 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chairman Kasemeyer and Chairman McIntosh:

The attached report is submitted by the Military Department (MD) to satisfy the April 2016 Joint Chairmen's Report, JCR page 25, Study Report requirement as follows:

Budget Code D50H0101, "*Report on Obtaining GED certification for the Freestate ChalleNGe Academy.*" Due October 1, 2016.

If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this Status Report, please contact BG(R) Annette Deener, Military Department Chief of Staff, 410 576-1451, [Annette.m.deener.nfg@mail.mil](mailto:Annette.m.deener.nfg@mail.mil).

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Major General, MDARNG  
The Adjutant General

Enclosures

Cc: Ms. Rebecca Ruff, DLS Budget Analyst

JOINT CHAIRMEN'S REPORT  
MARYLAND MILITARY DEPARTMENT  
MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD FREESTATE CHALLENGE ACADEMY

The information contained in this document is in response to the April 2016 Joint Chairmen's Report (page 25) requesting for a Status Report on Obtaining GED certification for the Freestate Challenge Academy: *The Military Department has indicated its intent in having the Freestate Challenge Academy become a GED option program and an alternative education program that includes credit recovery, in order to provide enhanced educational opportunities for youth participating in the program. The budget committees fully support this effort and request that the department submit a report on the progress made to achieve this designation and the plans for how the program will be impacted once the distinction is obtained, including the communication with the Department of Juvenile Services and the Department of Human Resources to coordinate outreach to at-risk youth eligible for the program. The report should be submitted to the budget committee no later than October 1, 2016.*

1. Update on the Freestate Challenge Academy becoming a GED Option Program:
  - a. On June 29, 2015, the Freestate Challenge Academy was certified as an approved GED Testing Facility.
  - b. The graduates from the June 2015 class were the first cadets (students) to take the GED test at the certified Freestate Challenge Academy testing location.
  - c. All future classes will utilize the Freestate Challenge Academy testing location for GED testing.
2. Update on the Freestate Challenge Academy becoming an Alternative Education Program to provide enhanced educational opportunities:
  - a. On May 13, 2016, the Freestate Challenge Academy was approved by the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) as an alternative education program for purposes of the compulsory attendance exemption.
  - b. Section 7-301 of the Education Article, Annotated Code of Maryland, sets forth the State's compulsory school attendance law. It requires a child who is age 5 or older and under 17 to "attend a public school regularly during the entire school year" unless the child satisfies an exemption to the law.
  - c. One of the exemptions is if the child "attends an alternative educational program." MSDE has determined that Freestate Challenge Academy is an alternative educational program under this exemption. Therefore, a 16 year old can legally withdraw from school to attend the Freestate Challenge Academy.
  - d. Please note that the age of compulsory school attendance will rise from 17 to 18 on July 1, 2017.
3. Plans for how the program will be impacted once this distinction has been obtained:
  - a. Increased enrollment at the Freestate Challenge Academy.
  - b. Increased number of students returning to school and obtaining credit recovery.
  - c. Increased graduation rates and GED completion.
  - d. Closer working relationship with MSDE to increase opportunities for after school employment, education and skills training.

- e. This distinction will give at risk youth a “second chance” and a greater opportunity with achieving success of becoming productive citizens.
  - f. The ChalleNGe Program's Managing for Results (MFR) measures have been updated as requested in the April 2016 JCR (page 26) and will be included with the Department’s FY18 Operating Budget submission.
4. Outreach efforts and communication with the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) and Department of Human Resources (DHR) to recruit at-risk youth eligible for the program:

The recruiters at the Freestate ChalleNGe academy have developed a strong working relationship with the DJS and Department of Social Services (DSS) at statewide locations. This partnership has been strengthened by conducting the following activities:

- a. Bi-weekly meetings with DJS and DSS staff including the family and children enrolled within their programs.
- b. Regular visits to DJS Judges and Magistrates in Prince George’s County and Baltimore City.
- c. Attending meetings for Foster Care transition at the DSS.
- d. On-site and offsite presentations for DJS and DHR staff, parents and youth.
- e. Attending DJS conferences, workshops and other activities throughout the state.
- f. Inviting DJS and DHR staff to attend various ChalleNGe events and functions.