§ 608-a. Military enhanced recognition, incentive and tribute ("MERIT") scholarships. 1. Eligible persons. a. Children, spouses and financial dependents of members of the armed forces or state organized militia who at any time on or after the second day of August, nineteen hundred ninety, while in service in the armed forces of the United States, as defined by subdivision eight of section one of the military law, or in a force of the state organized militia, as defined by subdivision nine of section one of the military law: (i) while a legal resident of New York state, died, became severely and permanently disabled or was classified as missing in action in a combat theater or combat zone of operations as part of military operations related to such military service or died as a result of injury or illness suffered or incurred during such military service; or (ii) while a legal resident of New York state, died or became severely and permanently disabled as a result of injury or illness suffered or incurred during military training operations in preparation for duty in a combat theater or combat zone of operations.

b. A member of the armed forces of the United States who: (i) became severely and permanently disabled as a result of service in the armed forces of the United States, as defined by subdivision eight of section one of the military law, in a combat theater or combat zone of operations as part of military operations at any time on or after the second day of August, nineteen hundred ninety; and (ii) was a legal resident of New York state at the time of military service.

c. A member of the armed forces of the United States who: (i) became severely and permanently disabled as a result of injury or illness suffered or incurred during military training operations in preparation for duty in a combat theater or combat zone of operations; and (ii) was a legal resident of New York state at the time of military service.

d. A member of the state organized militia who: (i) became severely and permanently disabled as a result of injury or illness suffered or incurred during active military service, as defined in subdivision six of section one of the military law; and (ii) was a legal resident of New York state at the time of military service.

2. Awards under this section shall be payable for each of not more than four academic years of undergraduate study or five years if a program normally requires five years, as defined by the commissioner pursuant to this article.