



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Department of Maryland
Legislative Commission

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**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 1515 – SHEILA E. HIXSON
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM for
SERVICE MEMBERS and VETERANS – ESTABLISHMENT**

The American Legion Department of Maryland now serving in its second century in communities throughout Maryland strongly supports House Bill 1515 now before the Health and Government Operations Committee.

This bill, providing a funding grant to local community service organizations is a sound, fundamental measure which hopefully will stem the rampant use of illegal drugs and opioids among our returning service personnel and, further, could reduce the tragic number of suicides—currently estimated at 22 per day across the nation by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

HB 1515 per the *Fiscal and Policy Note* accompanying the bill would provide matching grants to local community service-based organizations serving the behavioral needs of their community to tailor recovery programs to veterans in area concerning mental health and substance use and abuse recovery treatment.

Some funds used to support the programs could be minimized by the requirement for grantees to bill third parties such as insurance firms and Medicaid.

Presently there are more than 29,500 active-duty personnel assigned here throughout our State and an estimated 371,000 veterans who live in Maryland. Veterans, recent combat returnees and Vietnam era with many now in their 70's, are more likely to suffer from a variety of health problems including chronic, persistent pain, substance use disorders, chemical exposure problems and mental health issues.

It is these persons HB 1515 could help in a direct, concise manner with the goal of returning to their respective communities as a whole person.

In closing, The American Legion representing over 48,000 men and women in our armed forces, veterans who have served in all wars and conflicts since 1917 and their families—all Maryland residents—believes HB 1515 is the first step in achieving comprehensive recovery

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programs for active service, veterans and their dependent families. We respectfully request a favorable report on this bill and applaud Delegate Young for his continual support to his country through his deep compassion for service personnel, veterans and their families.

Yours, respectfully

Patrick Guibao

Patrick J. Guibao
Chair
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