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Frederick and Carroll Counties

Judiciary Committee

Subcommittees

Civil Law and Procedure
Family and Juvenile Law

Task Force to Study Crime
Classification and Penalties



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 22, 2022

**Favorable Testimony HB 579, Maryland Veterans Trust Fund –
CAM for Veterans Grant Program
David Perez Military Heroes Act (End 22 a Day)**

Dear Chair McIntosh, Vice Chair Chang and committee members:

House Bill 579 establishes a grant program for veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, or stress, seeking relief and needing financial assistance to obtain complementary and alternative medical treatments.

According to a study at the Watson Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at Brown University published in June of 2021:

- the suicide rate of veterans overall and adjusted for age and sex is 1.5 times that of the general population;
- this rate is likely a conservative one because, unlike earlier reports, the V.A. only counts veterans who were federally activated, leaving out Reservists and National Guardsmen who were not federally activated;
- one consequence of this change is that the oft-cited 21 veteran suicides per day figure is now about 17 per day;
- **the current actual rate is 27.5 per 100,000**, adjusting for age and sex and still absent Guardsmen and Reservists, meaning the rate has grown to be about 1.5 times worse since 2005;
- for veterans ages 18 to 34, the rate has increased by 76 percent since 2005.

These are heartbreaking and tragic statistic about the brave men and women who have served our country. And the statistics are getting worse.

HB579 is named in honor of Army veteran David Perez. He was a Marylander, a Veteran, a patriot with a big heart, and a friend of mine. He served in the United States Army for 11 years, and was a combat vet. After bravely and honorably serving his country he dedicate his life to helping other veterans deal with their challenges from their time served in the military. But in the fall of 2020 David's own challenges caught up with him and we lost him, way too soon.

According to the US Census Bureau's most recent statistics, there are at least 350,423 veterans living in Maryland. Minorities make up 137,807 of those veterans, and 50,418 of them were women. So veterans represent the length and breadth of our population, and so does the problem with veteran suicide. This doesn't hit only certain demographics of Maryland's population, it hits all because military service spans all demographics.

The expanded forms of treatment will provide more versatile care for those at risk of suicide. Treatments offered so far have obviously not been effective to meet the needs of enough of our veterans to bring down the numbers of suicides. Maryland veterans have sacrificed and fought for our freedoms, and as David did, they continue to serve our community even after they retire. They deserve treatment options that meet their needs; doing the same thing over and over again with the same poor results is not an option.

The men and women who lost their struggle with the often unseen impact of their service do not deserve to become nothing more than a statistic of our health service failures. They deserve to have their struggle make a difference for those who come after them.

I respectfully ask for a favorable report for HB579 Maryland Veterans Trust Fund – CAM for Veterans Grant Program – Established (David Perez Military Heroes Act (End 22 a Day)).

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D Cox', written in a cursive style.

Delegate Dan Cox, District 4
Frederick and Carroll Counties