



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB126: "Freedom to Serve"
Judicial Proceedings Committee
Wednesday, February 1, 2023 1:30pm

Maryland's police departments face a crisis in recruitment and retention of officers. This was exacerbated by the "Great Resignation" during the pandemic. Between 2020 and 2021, there was an 18% increase in the resignation rate and a 45% increase in the retirement rate. ([Police Executive Research Forum](#)). Police response times have significantly increased as a result; this threatens the health and safety of our communities ([NPR](#)).

In 2019, we enacted a narrow version of "Freedom to Serve." This legislation allowed Honorably Discharged Veterans who are Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) to apply to be police officers-- but only if they had a pending citizenship application.

The "Honorably Discharged Veteran" status signifies a completion of rigorous training; the discipline to serve faithfully; and a loyalty to the United States. For this reason, these individuals make great candidates to serve their communities as police officers.

This year's version, [SB126](#), would expand upon the 2019 legislation to allow all Honorably Discharged Veterans who are LPRs to apply to become police officers in Maryland. This legislation would honor veterans and increase the ethnic and linguistic diversity of departments. Bilingual officers are able to build strong relationships with members of the communities they protect and serve.

The Maryland Military Coalition has suggested an amendment to allow current members of the National Guard and Reserve Components who are Lawful Permanent Residents to apply to serve as police officers.

I urge the committee to give a favorable report with amendment to SB126.