



## MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

*Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy*

Statement of Jayson L. Spiegel  
Maryland Military Coalition

SB 0126 - Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission –  
Police Officer Certification - Eligibility  
February 1, 2023

### **FAVORABLE WITH AMENDMENT**

Dear Char Smith and Members of the Judicial Proceedings Committee:

The Maryland Military Coalition (MMC) **strongly supports SB 0126**, which will enable honorably discharged United States armed forces veterans, who are permanent legal residents of the United States, to become police officers even if they do not have a pending citizenship application.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a non-partisan organization of 19 Veteran organizations representing over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families -- almost half of the 355,000 veterans in the State.

Maryland currently has a **critical** shortage of law enforcement officers. Retirements and resignations exceed recruitment. The Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the District of Maryland stated during an interview on WJZ CBS Baltimore that the issue of police staffing shortages is "an extremely serious problem . . . (that is) not getting better, it's getting worse."

HB 0145 would expand the pool of potential law enforcement officers. Honorably discharged veterans, whether or not they have a pending citizenship application, have already demonstrated their willingness to serve their country and community. They have been vetted and passed a background check, and trained in safe use of weapons and rules of engagement. Many noncitizen veterans may have served in military police, master at arms, provost marshal, or other law enforcement assignments,

Moreover, everybody who has ever served, regardless of their specialty or branch of service has performed law enforcement functions by performing guard duty, credentials checks, and other activities.

Critically, Maryland needs law enforcement officers who speak foreign languages and possess cultural sensitivity to interact with non-English speaking, immigrant populations. Veterans who are themselves immigrants will bring these vital skills and experiences, including cultural competency, to their law enforcement careers.

Various states already have enacted legislation enabling resident alien veterans to become police officers:

- Three states (Colorado, Vermont and West Virginia) have no citizenship requirement to become a police officer.
- Seven states (Hawaii, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah and Washington) only require permanent resident status or work authorization.

The MMC strongly supports an **amendment** that would also **enable currently serving members of the National Guard and Reserve** to become police officers if they are permanent legal residents of the United States even if they do not have a pending citizenship application.

Members of the Guard and Reserve already live in the communities where they would serve. They undergo the exact same training as their active-duty counterparts and bring the same qualifications.

The Maryland National Guard has a Military Police Battalion. All National Guard personnel, regardless of their actual military specialty, are trained to support law enforcement and civil disturbance response. Many Maryland National Guard personnel were on duty at the Capitol after the January 6 Insurrection and were on duty in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray.

The **Army Reserve 200<sup>th</sup> Military Police Command**, headquartered at **Fort Meade**, is the **largest military police organization in the entire Department of Defense**. Army Reserve personnel assigned to that Command and its subordinate units would be prime candidates to fill law enforcement positions.

In fact, civilian law enforcement recruiters could team with National Guard or Reserve recruiters to identify noncitizens with an aptitude and interest in law enforcement. They could join the Guard or Reserve, complete Initial Entry Training, join a Reserve unit and then start training to be a law enforcement officer in their community. Given that police, the National Guard and Army Reserve all face severe recruiting challenges, such a partnership could be a "win-win."

We want to thank Senator Kagan for her leadership on this issue. I urge the Committee to favorably report the bill.

Respectfully,



Jayson Spiegel  
LTC USAR (Ret)  
President