

Word Count: 560

Approximate speaking time: 4 minutes

Time to Serve Act of 2024: Maryland General Assembly

For Maj. Gen. Janeen L. Birckhead

Good morning distinguished members of the Maryland General Assembly, I am honored to stand before you today in support of this piece of critical legislation our Governor has proposed – the Time to Serve Act of 2024.

This legislation is a vital step towards supporting Maryland state employees who also serve in a dual capacity as citizen Soldiers and Airmen in the Maryland National Guard.

These service members I speak of are truly committed to serving our state both in and out of uniform - and for more than just “one weekend a month.”

The Maryland National Guard has proven time and time again to be more than a part-time commitment for our service members, who have volunteered to protect our state and nation when called upon for periods far exceeding the 15 days of military leave granted to them by their employers.

Even during a typical year without pandemics or civil unrest, our service members do not only undergo 2 weeks of training and serve one weekend a month - which 15 days of military leave does not fully cover - they will also respond to severe weather emergencies and attend military schools required to progress their careers.

Currently, these state employees must choose between sacrificing personal leave or taking a leave of absence without pay to continue serving the Guard each year as they do.

For example, during the recent COVID-19 response, thousands of servicemembers volunteered to step away from their civilian jobs for extended periods to protect and serve our communities when they needed them most. Many of those service members were activated for nearly two years in service to our state.

By increasing military leave for state employees from 15 to 30 days, we will enable our citizen Soldiers and Airmen to serve the state they love without any personal expense. This act will significantly improve the quality of life for our state's service members, who often find it challenging to balance their work and military responsibilities.

Moreover, this legislation will bolster the effectiveness of the state government by enabling service members to volunteer for military schools and training opportunities, bringing back knowledge and experiences to their workplaces.

The Time to Serve Act of 2024 will also grant more maneuverability and latitude to our hard-working state employees performing arduous shift work, such as law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel to name a few. These employees will benefit immensely from the effects of the proposed legislation.

This legislation will also impact our efforts to recruit and retain high-quality people in both the Maryland National Guard and the Maryland State government. Our service members won't have to choose between their state career or military commitments when it comes to utilizing leave, making them more likely to remain in their positions and continue to serve in their dual capacities, which I view as an immense victory for all involved parties.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on the Time to Serve Act of 2024. This important piece of

legislation will improve the effectiveness of our state government agencies, while also providing our service members with the flexibility they need to continue serving in a dual capacity. By passing this act, we will demonstrate our support for those who continue to sacrifice so much for our state and our country.

Thank you for your consideration.