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March 7, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman, Chair

Senator Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West

Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB0615 – General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day

Position: Support

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Committee:

The Maryland Psychological Association, (MPA), which represents over 1,000 doctoral level psychologists throughout the state, asks the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee to report **FAVORABLY** on SB0615.

According to a report published by the Veterans Administration Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, 6,392 Veterans died by suicide in 2021; 114 more than in 2020. This number represents not just the lives lost, but the countless lives of families, loved ones, and community members who are forever impacted by the tragedy of their loss.

In 2021, suicide was the second-leading cause of death among Veterans under age 45-years-old. Some of the most heavily impacted groups include women Veterans, American Indian or Alaska Native Veterans, homeless Veterans, and justice-involved Veterans. Suicide is a complex problem that requires a national public health approach. By establishing a Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day, we are better poised to raise awareness about Veteran suicide, reduce stigma around mental illness, encourage individuals to seek help, facilitate healing for the suicide loss survivors, and demonstrate the state's commitment to suicide prevention as a priority.

As psychologists, many of whom are employed by the Veterans Health Administration, we witness first-hand the life-saving impacts of suicide prevention. The MPA strongly supports the establishment of a Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day to reflect on Veteran lives already lost to suicide and to pledge continued support to the Veteran community. We also encourage the state of Maryland to bolster suicide prevention efforts (e.g., increasing access to care, promoting secure firearm storage, implementing community collaborations) so that this pledge might be accompanied by action.

Thank you for considering our comments on SB0615. If we can be of any further assistance as the Committee considers this bill, please do not hesitate to contact MPA's Legislative Chair, Dr. Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D. at mpalegislativcommittee@gmail.com.

Respectfully submitted,

Brian Corrado, Psy.D. .

Brian Corrado, Psy.D.
President

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.

Stephanie Wolf, JD, Ph.D.
Chair, MPA Legislative Committee