



**Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Secretary**

**WES MOORE
GOVERNOR**

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**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

February 29, 2024

The Honorable Brian Feldman, Chair
Members, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
3 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

**SB887: Veterans Affairs- Responses to Arrested Veterans and Veterans in Crisis
INFORMATIONAL TESTIMONY**

Dear Chairman Feldman and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) would like to share information regarding SB887- Responses to Arrested Veterans and Veterans in Crisis.

SB887 seeks to require MDVA to receive referrals from state and local law enforcement agencies following the arrest of an individual who self identifies as a veteran. MDVA would then be required to contact each veteran and provide them with information on the department, on a specified nonprofit organization, "First Responders Action Group", and on other organizations serving veterans. The bill would also require MDVA to work in consultation with the Maryland Police and Correctional Training Commission to write and administer a training curriculum for law enforcement officers, establish a data collection process, and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the training and data collection methods.

MDVA is a relatively small state agency and maintains five core programs. At present, there are no existing MDVA programs or positions with the required subject matter expertise to implement this bill. Should an appropriation be made for this program to either the training commission or the department, MDVA would need additional staff (at least 1 contractual FTE for five years for a total cost to the department of \$401,315).

Currently, MDVA does not receive data on the number of interactions veterans have with law enforcement agencies in Maryland. However, as of 2018, according to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were 138 state and local law enforcement agencies with 16,459 sworn officers. Should MDVA be required to implement the requirements of this bill, the number of referrals received from law enforcement could be significant. While the department responds to inquiries from veterans seeking

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information on benefits, no MDVA program has care coordination specific to justice involved veterans in its mission.

Also of note, the State currently administers a care coordination program for veterans. Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, a program of the Maryland Department of Health/Behavioral Health Administration, receives referrals from providers and veterans who are seeking behavioral health services and who are in need of other wraparound support. This program is responsible for responding to referrals and for helping providers and veterans access needed resources.

Currently, MDVA does not have the subject matter expertise on staff to write crisis de-escalation curricula as proposed in the SB0887. However, the US Department of Justice provides no cost online training to law enforcement agencies in de-escalation tactics for military veterans in crisis as well as publishes digital toolkits for implementing veteran response teams.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anthony Woods".

Anthony Woods, Secretary
Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs