



Blue Star Families

bluestarfam.org

Maryland Senate

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Testimony of Kathy Roth-Douquet

Founder & CEO

Blue Star Families

February 8, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and distinguished Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of SB 0411.

I am the co-Founder and CEO of Blue Star Families— the nation’s largest and fastest growing military family support organization, with 275,000 members in our network and impacting more than 1.5 million military family members every year.

Since we founded in 2009, there has been a slow dawning of awareness of the need to respond to military families’ contributions, challenges, and sacrifices.

In 2009 I found myself simply adding the phrase “and military families” after “Veterans” when others spoke. So standing here today, 15 years later, on the cusp of Maryland committing to become the first state in the nation to formally expand the scope of its Veterans Department in order to strengthen military family support feels like a landmark moment.

The steps Maryland is considering here today would set a new bar for the rest of the nation, so we can all ***Do Our Part*** to preserve the All Volunteer Force.

But it’s not just passion underlying my excitement. It’s data.

We know that when communities effectively support military families, that effort has far-reaching implications, improving the well-being of our military and our national security but also improving our communities.

70% of active duty military families and 100% of Guard and reserve families live in civilian communities, not on a military installation.

Our research shows that families who feel those in their community understand, respect and support them have greater wellbeing and a higher likelihood of recommending military service. These families are more likely to settle in these communities and enhance the community's economic vibrance.

Military installations contribute billions of dollars to Maryland's economy. This new name signals to those who make basing decisions how seriously the state takes its responsibility to service members wellbeing.

By broadening the scope to include "Military Families" in the Department's name, Maryland demonstrates a groundbreaking approach to the well-being of the entire military community.

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak here today and to show my support for SB 0411. I am happy to answer any questions.