

Clark Pennington In-Favor SB-0887.pdf

Uploaded by: Clark Pennington

Position: FAV

Clark Pennington – In-favor of SB0887

I want to start by thanking the state assembly for the opportunity to share these remarks, even though I cannot be with you all today, I'm grateful for your time and effort spent in helping us fulfill the First Responders Action Group's mission of supporting our Veterans and First Responders.

Through this legislation, we hope that our hallmark program, The Veterans Justice Initiative, can bring the same success in Maryland as it has in other areas of the country. The Veterans Justice Initiative aims to empower first responders and community partners in their interactions with Veterans through a three-pillar approach.

The first pillar is the Veterans Crisis Intervention Training. Our experienced police professionals, Veterans, and trainers guide our first responders and law enforcement officers through an extensive training program that allows them to build rapport with a Veteran in crisis. This is done through the understanding of military culture, deployment affects, common mental health issues facing many of the post 9-11 Veterans like Post Traumatic Stress Disorders, Traumatic Brain Injuries, and self-medication resulting in substance abuse. After de-escalating the Veteran out of crisis, our staff further shares and provides critical resources available to the Veteran population, thus reducing repeated calls for service and reduces further escalation of the crisis past the initial call. The partnerships the First Responders Action Agency brings to bear on this topic are like no other experienced in police de-escalation training. So far, we have trained 3,265 officers in the appropriate response to Veterans in crisis so that the situation does not escalate, thus saving lives and taxpayer money.

The second is casework assistance. Alongside our partners at the Independence Fund, a national Veteran Service Organization, our casework team can support first responders in finding appropriate resources for Veterans they are interacting with who are not only in crisis, but may be experiencing food insecurity, substance abuse issues, and homelessness. Our team works as a case management service that propels and supports individuals in accessing and achieving their individual goals while also developing and cultivating strong community relationships to bring added resources to the forefront of Veteran care.

Lastly, we aim to support counties in establishing Veterans Treatment Courts. By utilizing these systems, we aim to help Veterans struggling with substance abuse that may lead to criminality, thus seeking solutions rather than punishment to the underlying problems producing criminality.

According to recent data, there are almost 200,000 Veterans currently incarcerated and one in three Veterans report having been arrested. We know that Veterans, especially ones that have served in combat, come back with Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic Brain Injuries and other risk factors that can lead them to substance abuse or worse. We know the warning signs and we owe it to our nation's heroes to implement systems to help them avoid criminality and utilize the resources available to them.

We've seen great success with the Veterans Justice Initiative and hope to continue our mission with the support of the great state of Maryland.

SB0887 In-Favor of Bill Testmony (1).pdf

Uploaded by: Kevin Grubb

Position: FAV

Kevin Grubb - Witness testimony in Favor

B0887 Veterans Affairs – Responses to Arrested Veterans and Veterans in Crisis

My name is Kevin Grubb and I'm in favor of SB0887. I am a former Deputy Chief of Police for the Frederick Police Department and an Air Force Veteran. I'm currently employed with **The Independence Fund**, a sister organization to the **First Responders Action Group (FRAG) and the Veterans Justice Initiative (VJI)**. We are attempting to offer its programs to Maryland's first responders and Maryland Veterans through this bill.

As part of this Bill, we aim to intervene with Veterans at the initial 911 call or their initial contact with first responders. VJI focuses on training first responders on how to best interact with Veterans experiencing a mental health or substance abuse crisis. VJI also identifies additional state and federal resources to help local communities best respond to a Veteran in crisis like Veterans Court and VA sponsored programs.

We know that the services available to our heroes through the VA and other private entities are not taken advantage of and we are here to fill that gap. We are here to facilitate a long-term solution for communities and Veterans by advocating and working within the provided systems to improve the quality of life for our Veterans while assisting our Maryland communities to reduce potential long-term negative interactions before they happen.

Through this training and community connections, we hope to deescalate early experiences with the criminal justice system and explore other alternatives to arrest, emergency petitions, and just doing nothing. This will significantly lower recidivism and alleviate the burden on the criminal justice system. After being notified of an arrested Veteran, we will send a case worker to the local detention center and attempt to divert that Veteran to available programs.

In November and December of 2023, VJI trained and provided a 3-hr. block of instruction to over 50 officers at the University of Maryland Baltimore Police and Public Safety on how to identify veterans and how to deescalate crisis situations. Those officers received Maryland In-service credits from the Maryland Police and Corrections Training Commission for the training provided by VJI.

During that training, we were contacted by an attendee who became emotional and started to share his story of being in the military and what occurred during his deployment. After that contact we were able to connect him with a case worker at **The Independence Fund** and he is now receiving counseling. We not only provide training, but also case work and outreach to Veterans and First Responders

We help close the gap on what services the Veterans Administration can provide/do not have the resources to provide.

Again, I support SB0887.

LOI SB887 2024.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Dana Burl

Position: INFO



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

**WES MOORE
GOVERNOR**

**ARUNA MILLER
LT. GOVERNOR**

**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

THE WINELAND BUILDING, FOURTH FLOOR
16 FRANCIS STREET, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TOLL FREE: 866-793-1577 • ANNAPOLIS: 410-260-3838 • FAX: 410-216-7928

veterans.maryland.gov
TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

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 black ink that reads "Anthony Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a long, sweeping underline.

Anthony Woods, Secretary
Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs