

SB0615_MHAMD_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Dan Martin

Position: FAV

**Senate Bill 615 General Provisions - Commemorative Days - Maryland Veterans Suicide
Awareness Day**

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 8, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 615.

SB 615 requires the Governor to annually proclaim July 11 as Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day.

Statistics related to the prevalence of mental health disorders among U.S. veterans are startling. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and 19.5 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury during deployment. Approximately 50 percent of returning service members who need treatment for mental health conditions seek it, but only half who receive treatment receive adequate care.

The rate of suicide among veterans is a national tragedy. There were 6,392 veteran suicide deaths in 2021 – an average of 17.5 every day – including 89 Marylanders.¹ Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among veterans under 45.²

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Maryland is home to approximately 350,000 veterans. A Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day will demonstrate support for these individuals and their families, raise awareness about veteran suicide, and help prevent suicide deaths. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 615 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2021/2021-State-Data-Sheet-Maryland-508.pdf>

² https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865

Maryland Catholic Conference_FAV_SB615.pdf

Uploaded by: Diane Arias

Position: FAV



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

March 8, 2024

Senate Bill 615

**General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide
Awareness Day**

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 615 requires the Governor to annually proclaim July 11 as Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day.

Establishing a commemorative day can significantly raise awareness and support for veterans in need, emphasizing that their dedicated service is not overlooked. In 2019, Maryland reported 99 suicides among residents who had served in the Armed Forces, underscoring the challenges veterans face, including physical and emotional hardships resulting from service-related trauma or injuries.¹ It is crucial to prioritize the care of these individuals who courageously defended our nation's freedoms. Many veterans experience lasting effects, often manifested in conditions such as PTSD. Commemorative days not only enhance community awareness but also serve as opportunities for local organizations to garner economic support and expand resources.

The Catholic Conference, committed to upholding the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, recognizes that suicide has profound impacts on individuals and their families. This bill aims to raise awareness about suicide within a population that has made significant sacrifices and deserves support in addressing this issue.

For these reasons, the MCC asks for a favorable report on **SB 615**.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://veterans.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/2022-Annual-Report-FINAL-010923.pdf>

SB 615 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
Anne Arundel County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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11 Bladen Street, Room 320
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3658 · 301-858-3658
800-492-7122 Ext. 3658
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Bryan.Simonaire@senate.state.md.us

The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Written Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 615

Chairman and members of the Education, Energy, and Environment Committee, I am here to introduce and voice my support for Senate Bill 615 – *General Provisions - Commemorative Days - Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day*.

As amended, Senate Bill 615 would require the Governor to annually proclaim September 30th as Maryland Veterans Suicide Prevention Day.

SB 615 Sponsor Amendment-313120.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



SB0615/313120/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

21 FEB 24
17:23:24

BY: Senator Simonaire
(To be offered in the Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee)

AMENDMENT TO SENATE BILL 615

(First Reading File Bill)

On page 2, in line 8, strike "**JULY 11**" and substitute "**SEPTEMBER 30**".

SB 615 Sponsor Amendment-723520.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



SB0615/723520/1

AMENDMENTS
PREPARED
BY THE
DEPT. OF LEGISLATIVE
SERVICES

01 FEB 24
10:33:48

BY: Senator Simonaire
(To be offered in the Education, Energy, and the Environment
Committee)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 615

(First Reading File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 1, in line 3, strike “**Awareness**” and substitute “**Prevention**”; and in line 5, strike “Awareness” and substitute “**Prevention**”.

AMENDMENT NO. 2

On page 2, in lines 9 and 11, in each instance, strike “**AWARENESS**” and substitute “**PREVENTION**”.

SB 615 General Provisions - Commemorative Days - M

Uploaded by: Larry Walton

Position: FAV



200 St. Paul Place, #2510 | Baltimore, MD 21202
1-866-542-8163 | Fax: 410-895-0269 | TTY: 1-877-434-7598
aarp.org/md | mdaarp@aarp.org | twitter: @aarpmaryland
facebook.com/aarpmid

**SB 615 General Provisions - Commemorative Days - Maryland Veterans Suicide
Awareness Day
FAVORABLE
Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee
March 8, 2024**

Good Afternoon Chair Feldman and members of the Senate Education, Energy and Environment Committee. I am Larry Walton, an advocacy volunteer and executive council member with AARP Maryland. I am also a Vietnam Veteran. I am also resident of Berlin Maryland. AARP MD advocates on behalf of two million Marylanders age 50 and over. I am here today to support in support of SB 615 General Provisions—Commemorative Days- Maryland Veteran’s Suicide Awareness Day. We thank Senator Simonaire for sponsoring this bill.

SB 615 requires the Governor to annually proclaim July 11 as Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day.

At AARP we value the freedom and rights secured by veterans, the military and their families. The service and sacrifices will never be forgotten. AARP will continue to advocate for veterans’ issues; we’ll provide relevant information and resources to assist them and their loved ones with whatever challenges or opportunities they face.

Veteran’s suicide is a tragedy. According to an AARP article in 2023, a [new study](#) suggests the rate of suicide among veterans may be higher than United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reports show. The study from [America’s Warrior Partnership](#) in collaboration with The Department of Defense (DOD) and The University of Alabama found the rate of Veteran suicide was 24 a day nationally, compared to what the VA is reporting as 17.

Suicide among Veterans is a problem. It is an issue that cannot be easily fixed, but it is one that should be addressed, and we believe SB 615 will bring greater awareness of veteran suicide and the tools available to help veterans and their families. It will be a day of reflection, recollection, and determination for Maryland Veterans, Service Members, Family Members, to remember this tragedy.

We respectfully request a favorable report for SB 615. For questions or additional information, please feel free to contact Tammy Bresnahan, Associate State Director of Advocacy at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.

AARP
Real Possibilities

Nash MMC oral testimony_SB 615_General Provisions_

Uploaded by: Lynn Nash

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

Statement of CAPT Lynn Nash, PhD, RN
Maryland Military Coalition

SB 615- General Provisions – Commemorative Days –
Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day
March 7, 2024
FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I am here today to ask for a FAVORABLE report by the Committee on **SB 615 - General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day**, sponsored by Senators Simonaire, Ready and Sallings, Jennings, Iam, Hershey, Hester, Gallion, Folden, Augustine, McKay, Jackson, Lewis-Youn and Brooks—all members of the Veterans Caucus. I am grateful to all of you for this measure. I am a nurse and I currently serve on the Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families.

Suicide rates have been increasing for the past twenty years, but among active-duty personnel and veterans of the post-9/11 wars, the suicide rate is even higher, outpacing average Americans. Do you know that **FOUR times** as many active-duty personnel and war veterans of post-9/11 conflicts **have died of suicide rather than in combat**? These high suicide rates are caused by multiple factors, including risks inherent to fighting in any war such as high exposure to trauma, stress, the “military” culture and training, continued access to guns, and the difficulty of reintegrating into civilian life.

According to the Centers for Disease Control’s most recent data, **Maryland had 620 suicides in 2021¹; of which 89 were veterans².**

Here are some suicide statistics from the Department of Veteran Affairs³

- In each year from 2001 through 2020, the age- and sex-adjusted suicide rates of Veterans **exceeded those of non-Veteran U.S. adults.**
- In 2020, there were **6,146 Veteran suicides.**

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Suicide Mortality by State](#).

² U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, [State-Level Veteran Suicide Data](#): 2021 Update

³ U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, [2022 National Veteran Suicide Report](#).

Subject: **SB 615 - General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day - Favorable**

- the rate for Veterans was **57.3% higher than that of non-Veterans adults.**
- **Firearms accounted for 71% of those deaths.**
- Suicide was the **13th leading cause of death among Veterans** overall, and **the second leading cause of death among Veterans under age 45.**
- More importantly, it is not only the veteran themselves that are at risk, but also the family members who often endure high stress, problems with finances, long deployments and single parenting.

Remember “22 a day”? Despite all that we have done to improve behavioral health services across Maryland and the Nation, the veteran rate of suicide is only down to **16.8 per day.**

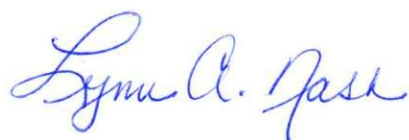
Even ONE veteran suicide death is too much! Raising awareness of Veteran suicide helps.

Maryland is home to 34,444 active-duty service members, 14,292 active-duty spouses and 25,642 reservists/national guard members with 28,019 family members⁴. These are Department of Defense numbers only and do not include the 1,700 active-duty U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) members and the 7,000 PHS retirees and their families or the active duty and retired National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) service members who also live in Maryland. In addition, there are 355,787 veteran households⁵. **Maryland must continue to raise awareness about veteran suicide.**

The Maryland Military Coalition, is a voluntary, non-partisan organization representing 21 veteran service organizations who, in turn, serve over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families. The Coalition ***strongly supports*** SB 615 - **General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day** and asks for your **favorable report.**

We thank the Veteran Caucus Sponsors of this important legislation and their continued support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,



Lynn A. Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service
Communications Director

Attachment: Maryland Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021

Maryland Military Coalition Member Organizations Follow

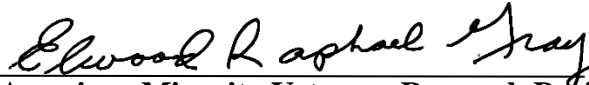
⁴ [Military One Source](#), as of December 31, 2022

⁵ [VA Claim Insider](#), August 10, 2023

Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition


Air Force Sergeants Association


American Military Society


American Minority Veterans Research Project

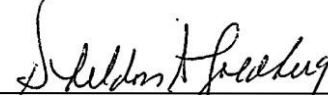

Association of the United States Navy



Commissioned Officers Association of the
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Disabled American Veterans


Distinguished Flying Cross Association


Fleet Reserve Association


Jewish War Veterans of the USA


Maryland Air National Guard Retirees'
Association


Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce


Military Officers Association of America


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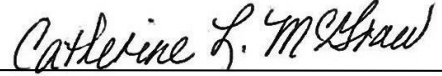

Montford Point Marines of America



National Association for Black Veterans


Naval Enlisted Reserve Association


NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers


Reserve Organization of America


Society of Military Widows


National Active and Retired Federal Employees
Veterans Affairs Directorate, NARFE MD


Veterans of Foreign Wars

Nash MMC written testimony_SB 615_General Provisio

Uploaded by: Lynn Nash

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

March 8, 2024

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

Subject: Request for a FAVORABLE Report - SB 615 - General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day

Dear Chair Feldman and Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I write to recommend a FAVORABLE report by the Committee on **SB 615 - General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day**, sponsored by Senators Simonaire, Ready and Sallings, Jennings, Iam, Hershey, Hester, Gallion, Folden, Augustine, McKay, Jackson, Lewis-Youn and Brooks—all members of the Veterans Caucus. I am grateful to all of you for this measure. I am a nurse and I currently serve on the Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families.

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Subject: **SB 615 - General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day - Favorable**

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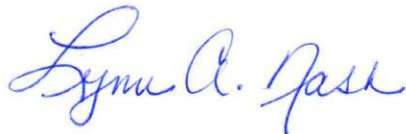
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We thank the Veteran Caucus Sponsors of this important legislation and their continued support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

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Lynn A. Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service
Communications Director

Attachment: Maryland Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021

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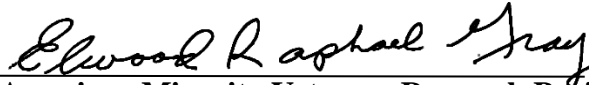
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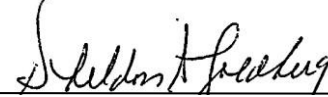

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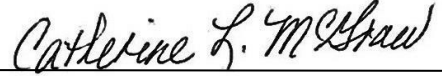

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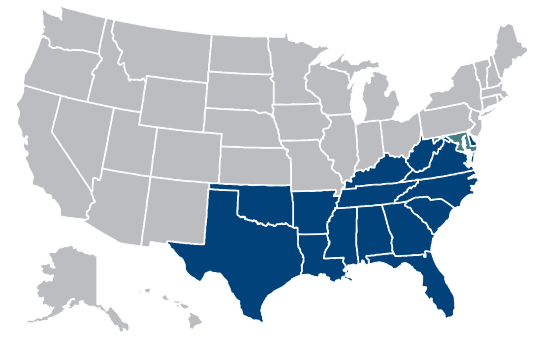
Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is leading efforts to understand suicide risk factors, develop evidence-based prevention programs, and prevent Veteran suicide through a public health approach. As part of its work, VA analyzes data at the national and state levels to guide the design and execution of the most effective strategies to prevent Veteran suicide.

The 2021 state data sheets present the latest findings from VA's ongoing analysis of suicide rates and include the most up-to-date state-level suicide information for the United States.^a This data sheet includes information about Maryland Veteran suicides by age, sex, and suicide method and compares this with regional and national data.

After accounting for age differences,^b the Veteran suicide rate in Maryland:

- Was significantly lower than the national Veteran suicide rate
- Was not significantly different from the national general population suicide rate



Southern Region

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Delaware
- District of Columbia
- Florida
- Georgia
- Kentucky
- Louisiana
- Maryland
- Mississippi
- North Carolina
- Oklahoma
- South Carolina
- Tennessee
- Texas
- Virginia
- West Virginia

Maryland Veteran Suicide Deaths, 2021

Sex	Veteran Suicides
Male	80–90
Female	<10
All	89

To protect confidentiality, suicide death counts are presented in ranges when the number of deaths in any one category was lower than 10.

Maryland, Southern Region, and National Veteran Suicide Deaths and Rates by Age Group, 2021^c

Age Group	Maryland Veteran Suicides	Southern Region Veteran Suicides	National Veteran Suicides	Maryland Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	Southern Region Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	National Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000
18–34	<10	389	894	--	47.8	49.6
35–54	20–30	757	1,704	--	33.9	35.5
55–74	35	1,001	2,286	22.9	30.4	29.9
75+	27	636	1,467	35.1	35.6	32.1
All	89	2,798	6,392	24.5	34.4	33.9

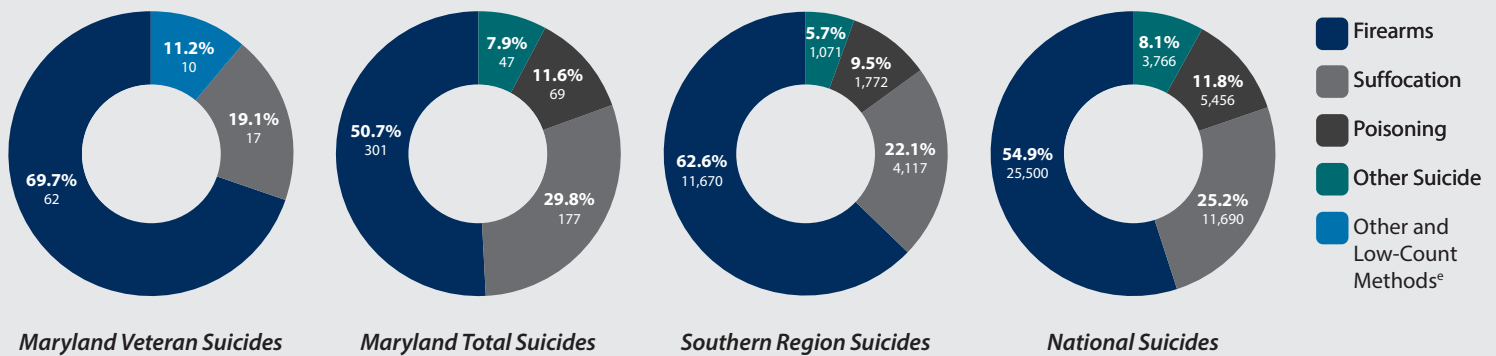
Maryland Veteran and Total Maryland, Southern Region, and National Suicide Deaths and Rates by Age Group, 2021^c

Age Group	Maryland Veteran Suicides	Maryland Total Suicides	Southern Region Total Suicides	National Total Suicides	Maryland Veteran Suicide Rate per 100,000	Maryland Suicide Rate per 100,000	Southern Region Suicide Rate per 100,000	National Suicide Rate per 100,000
18–34	<10	171	5,667	14,230	--	12.7	19.7	18.8
35–54	20–30	193	6,141	15,263	--	12.0	19.0	18.2
55–74	35	165	4,970	12,411	22.9	11.4	17.2	16.2
75+	27	65	1,852	4,508	35.1	16.3	22.1	20.3
All	89	594	18,630	46,412	24.5	12.4	18.9	18.0



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Maryland Veteran and Total Maryland, Southern Region, and National Suicide Deaths by Method,^d 2021



These 2021 state data sheets are based on a collaborative effort among the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS). The statistics presented are derived from multiple data sources, including the VA Office of Enterprise Integration, the VA Serious Mental Illness Treatment Resource and Evaluation Center, VA Health Outcomes Military Exposures (HOME) Program, the VA Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention, and the DoD Defense Suicide Prevention Office.

These sheets include information on the Veteran population and general U.S. population age 18 and older, with deaths reported in the contiguous United States, Alaska, and Hawaii. The total state, regional, and national counts and rates presented include both Veterans and non-Veterans.

Suicide deaths are identified based on the underlying cause of death indicated on the state death certificate. For Veteran decedents, this information comes from the NCHS National Death Index (NDI) and was obtained from the joint VA/DoD Mortality Data Repository (MDR). Suicide death counts for the general U.S. population were obtained from CDC WONDER (Wide-ranging ONline Data for Epidemiologic Research).⁷ Underlying cause of death is defined as (a) the disease or injury that initiated the train of events leading directly to death, or (b) the circumstances of the accident or violence that produced the fatal injury.⁹ The ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases, 10th revision) codes used to define suicide deaths are X60–X84, U03, and Y87.0.

Suicide rates presented are unadjusted rates per 100,000, calculated as the number of suicide deaths in 2021 divided by the estimated population and multiplied by 100,000. Significance statements are based on the ratio of direct age-adjusted rates, using the 2000 projected U.S. population as the standard.¹⁰ Linearly interpolated estimates of the Veteran Population Projection Model 2020 (VetPop2020) were used in calculating rates to estimate the Veteran population for each state and age group.¹ These estimates were calculated to reflect the Veteran population estimate as of July 1st. Based on guidance from the VA Office of Enterprise Integration, the interpolated July 1st Veteran population estimates were generated by calculating the population difference between current and prior year estimates on September 30th provided in VetPop and multiplying by an adjustment factor for the time difference between July 1st and September 30th. NCHS single-race population estimates were used to estimate the general U.S. population.¹

Veteran age-specific counts may not sum to the total counts because there are a small number of deaths for which age information is unavailable. These deaths are included in overall counts and rates but are not distributed among age groups; therefore, they are not included in age-specific counts, age-specific rates, or age-adjusted rates. Rates are marked with an asterisk (*) when the rate is calculated from fewer than 20 deaths. Rates based on small numbers of deaths are considered statistically unreliable because a small change in the number of deaths might result in a large change in the rate. Because suicide rates based on fewer than 20 suicide deaths are considered statistically unreliable, any comparisons between age-adjusted rates and underlying age-specific rates based on fewer than 20 suicide deaths should be interpreted with caution.

To protect privacy and to prevent revealing information that may identify specific decedents, counts and rates are suppressed when based on 0–9 individuals. For suicide deaths by method, in cases where the number of deaths in any one of the categories was lower than 10, the categories with the smallest counts were combined until the minimum count of 10 was reached, to maintain confidentiality.

^a The 2021 state data sheets contain suicide information for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

^b Suicide rates presented in the tables are unadjusted for age. Age-adjusting suicide rates ensures that the differences in rates are not due to differences in the age distributions of the populations being compared. In some cases, the results of comparisons of age-adjusted rates differ from those of unadjusted rates. Comparison of rates is based on the ratio of age-adjusted rates; significance is determined based on a p-value <0.05.

^c Rates presented are unadjusted rates per 100,000. To protect privacy, and prevent revealing information that may identify specific individuals, counts and rates are suppressed when based on 0–9 people. Rates calculated with a numerator of less than 20 are considered statistically unreliable, as indicated by an asterisk (*).

^d Methods are based on ICD-10 codes X72 to X74 for firearms, X60 to X69 for poisoning (including intentional overdose), and X70 for suffocation (including strangulation). "Other Suicide" includes all other intentional self-harm, including cutting/piercing, drowning, falling, fire/flame, other land transport, being struck by/against, and other specified or unspecified injury.

^e "Other Suicide" refers to all methods of suicide death apart from firearms, suffocation, and poisoning. "Low-Count Methods" refers to methods involved in fewer than 10 deaths in a given state or territory. In states or territories with fewer than 10 firearm deaths, suffocation deaths, or poisoning deaths, those data are represented in the "Other and Low-Count Methods" category to protect the privacy of individual suicide decedents.

^f National, regional, and state general population suicide counts are obtained from the CDC WONDER online database. For more information on CDC WONDER, please refer to <http://wonder.cdc.gov/ucd-icd10.html>.

^g World Health Organization, Manual of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases, Injuries, and Causes of Death, based on the recommendations of the Ninth Revision Conference, 1975; Geneva, 1977.

^h Klein, RJ, and Schoenborn, CA. Age adjustment using the 2000 projected U.S. population. Healthy People Statistical Notes, No. 20. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics. January 2001.

ⁱ Veteran Population Projection Model 2020 (VetPop2020), Predictive Analytics and Actuary, Office of Enterprise Integration, Department of Veterans Affairs.

^j CDC, NCHS, Single-race Population Estimates, United States, 2021. July 1st resident population by state, age, sex, single-race, and Hispanic origin, on CDC WONDER Online Database. Vintage 2021 estimates released by U.S. Census Bureau on June 30, 2022. Accessed at <http://wonder.cdc.gov/single-race-single-year-v2021.html>.

SB615 FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Morgan Mills

Position: FAV



March 8, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and distinguished members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee,

NAMI Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for people living with mental illnesses, their families, and the wider community.

Nearly 1 in 4 active duty members showed signs of a mental health condition. Each day, an average of 20 veterans die by suicide. NAMI MD is dedicated to destigmatizing mental health support and creating more opportunities for those with mental health conditions to speak freely and get the support that they need. For these reasons, we urge a favorable report.

Kathryn S. Farinholt
Executive Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland

Contact: Morgan Mills
Compass Government Relations
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MPA_Comm_SB0615 Letter of Support_20240307.pdf

Uploaded by: stephanie wolf

Position: FAV



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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

Testimony SB615.docx.pdf

Uploaded by: Dana Burl

Position: FWA



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

**WES MOORE
GOVERNOR**

**ARUNA MILLER
LT. GOVERNOR**

**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

March 8, 2024

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

**SB615: General Provisions- Commemorative Days- Veteran Suicide Awareness Day
*Testimony***

Good morning Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) submits this letter of support for Senate Bill 615 with two amendments: (1) to change the commemorative day to September 30 and (2) to change "Awareness" to "Prevention" in the day's title.

SB615, as introduced, seeks to require the Governor to proclaim a designated day as Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day. The first amendment will align the day with September's National Suicide Prevention Month and with September 30th's designation as National Suicide Prevention Day. The second amendment changes the designation to "Maryland Veterans Suicide Prevention Day". Safe messaging is important when we talk about suicide. Incorporating the word prevention immediately opens up the opportunity to talk about suicide as preventable and that prevention resources are available for veterans seeking help.

Suicide is a serious public health issue and the top clinical priority for the US Department of Veterans Affairs. Between 2020 and 2021 suicide deaths in Maryland among those who served in the military increased from 79 to 89 deaths. In 2021, of the 594 suicide deaths in Maryland, veterans accounted for 15% of them.

For three years, Maryland has been a part of the VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and their Families. Last November, Governor Moore signed an executive order reaffirming his administration's commitment to combating veteran suicide deaths in Maryland. Governor Moore also launched Ask the Question, a campaign to raise awareness of the importance of screening for military service when working with clients.

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veterans.maryland.gov
TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

Designating September 30 as Maryland Veterans Suicide Prevention Day would provide the Department with an additional tool to highlight the Governor's Challenge and initiatives to prevent suicide in the veteran population. Suicide is preventable and together we can save veterans lives; MDVA respectfully requests this committee provide a favorable report on SB615.

SB 615 - EEE - MDH - LOSWA.pdf

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Position: FWA



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

March 8, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401-1991

**RE: Senate Bill 615 – General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans
Suicide Awareness Day – Letter of Support with Amendment**

Dear Chair Feldman and Committee Members:

The Maryland Department of Health (Department) respectfully submits this letter of support with amendment for Senate Bill (SB) 615 – General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day.

SB 615 requires the Governor to declare July 11 as Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day every year. The Department supports the intention of this bill to bring attention to and provide awareness for the issues leading to veteran suicides and work to destigmatize mental health support. The Department recommends an amendment to the bill to align with National Military and Veterans Suicide Awareness Day, which takes place on September 22nd each year¹.

If you have any further questions, please contact Sarah Case-Herron, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs, at sarah.case-herron@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,

Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H.
Secretary

¹ [H.RES. 674](#)

AMENDMENTS TO SENATE BILL 615
(First Reader File Bill)

AMENDMENT NO. 1

On page 2, in line 8, strike "JULY 11" and substitute "SEPTEMBER 22"

Rationale:

This change will align the state of Maryland with the National Military and Veterans Suicide Awareness Day.