



# Blue Star Families

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Maryland House

Health and Government Operations

Testimony of Yolanda Rayford

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Blue Star Families

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Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and distinguished Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of HB 0431.

I am originally from Maryland and for more than two decades traveled with my active-duty Air Force spouse around the world. In 2008, our family moved back to Maryland, basing our decision on the quality of life, support services, and family.

My experience as an active-duty spouse gave me exceptional insights into the importance of supporting military families, which is why I am proud to now lead Blue Star Families' Baltimore Chapter. Blue Star Families is the largest and fastest growing organization dedicated to serving military- and Veteran-connected families, with nearly 275,000 members and programs reaching 1.5 million individuals every year - 5,900 of those are in Maryland, and I am thrilled to share that we we are poised to expand our programming here later this year, so that number will continue to grow!

The demand for Blue Star Families' Chapters continues to grow, thanks in large part to our model: Unlike many groups, we are inclusive of the WHOLE family, are embedded in communities, and intentionally work to connect military and Veteran families with their civilian neighbors.

This is why we are so thrilled to have Maryland, with its deep-rooted military tradition, leading the nation by also recognizing that honoring veterans and military members means embracing and supporting families as well.

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. Here at Blue Star Families, we ask all Americans, at all levels, to Do Their Part to support military families, and in so doing to contribute to the common defense. We are so grateful to see Maryland considering this legislation and thus responding to that call to action in such a meaningful way. I invite Maryland officials to take this opportunity to engage with military and veteran families, propose new legislation benefiting our community, and expand services and programs.

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak here today and to show my support for HB 0431. I am happy to answer any questions.