



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

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**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF House Bill 431
Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs
House Health and Government Operations Committee
February 6, 2024**

Thank you Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and members of the committee.

I am honored to appear before you today and I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on HB0431, a bill that renames my Department to the Department of Veterans and Military Families. I'm grateful to Senator Gile and Delegate Pruski for introducing this bill.

I am Tony Woods, Secretary of Veterans Affairs and I lead the Department of Veterans Affairs. My Department's mission is to "assist veterans, active duty service members, their families and dependents, in securing benefits earned through military service." In my first year in this role, I have spent time listening to each of those communities - and more.

While my Department serves Maryland's military families, I understood that we were not doing enough. There are real challenges associated with the military lifestyle, and the State of Maryland has a role to play.

Blue Star Families, a prominent advocate for military families, has illuminated the numerous challenges faced by veteran and military families. Their annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey exposed financial hardships, housing concerns, food security, and the disproportionately high unemployment rates among spouses. These issues, compounded by the unique aspects of military life, demand our attention and action.

Our state is home to more than 60,000 active-duty military family members, not to mention veteran caregivers and survivors whom we serve too.

Our commitment to addressing these challenges is reflected in our support of this legislation. This bill seeks to rename the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Department of Veterans and Military Families, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support. By enhancing the department's capacity to coordinate programs dedicated to military families, we send a resounding message that Maryland is united in welcoming and supporting those who have served.

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This won't just be backed by words. This bill ensures that a Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs can address the unique needs of our military and veteran families.

In this pivotal moment, let us bridge the gap between words and action, ensuring that the resilience of military families, caregivers, and survivors is met with tangible support.

I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on HB0431 to ensure that we can serve ALL of those who serve and create a Maryland where no one is left behind.

Sincerely,

Anthony C. Woods
Secretary