



# MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

*Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy*

February 6, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 241  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report** – HB0431 – Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC) and as its President, I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report** by the Committee on ***HB0431 – Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs***, sponsored by Delegate Andrew Pruski.

This legislation is a critical component of Governor Moore’s commitment to make 2024 the Year of the Military Family in Maryland. As Governor Moore said in December 2023, “Our military families sacrifice everything so their loved ones can serve. They are just as much a part of the American story as those in the armed forces. . . . States have a duty to answer the service and sacrifice of our military families with strong support.”

Currently, Maryland is home to:

- 14,292 active-duty spouses
- 28,070 active-duty children
- 10,924 National Guard and Reserve spouses
- 17,095 National Guard and Reserve children
- 51,835 military retirees; and 6,348 survivors<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, there are a significant number of military family members in Maryland, with needs that the State can help address.

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<sup>1</sup> \* As of December 31, 2022, <https://public.militaryonesource.mil/state-policymakers-inquiry>

Renaming the Department is more than a symbolic act. It is a demonstration of Maryland's commitment to military families and developing policies and initiatives that address their concerns and needs. We strongly support creating a new position of Deputy Secretary for Military Family Policy and Programs. Establishing a Deputy Secretary focused on military families ensures that the military families' portfolio does not become an additional duty for the existing Deputy Secretary. Instead, the bill ensures that a senior official reporting directly to the Secretary is focused on the unique needs of military families. We anticipate that the new Deputy Secretary could become the state-wide focus for activities, research, outreach and support for spouses and military children. The MMC is excited about working with the new Deputy Secretary following enactment of the legislation.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports** HB0341 and asks for a ***FAVORABLE*** report from the Health and Government Operations Appropriations Committee. This bill supports the Moore-Miller Administration's Year of the Military Families, helping to move Maryland to the forefront of supporting those who serve alongside our Service Members.

The Moore-Miller administration has consistently supported transitioning Service Members and their families. This legislation goes a long way in demonstrating the administration's commitment to those currently serving, Veterans, retirees, their family members and their survivors.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups, representing over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

We want to thank Delegate Pruski for sponsoring this legislation and his continued strong support of the uniformed services community including families, in Maryland.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Spiegel', written in a cursive style.

Jayson Spiegel  
LTC USAR (Ret)  
President

Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition

James P. Monahan  
Air Force Sergeants Association

John P. May  
American Military Society

Elwood R. Raphael Gray  
American Minority Veterans Research Project

W. W.  
Association of the United States Navy

Lynn A. Gask  
Commissioned Officers Association of the  
US Public Health Service

Wilbur B. Fisher  
Disabled American Veterans

Seldon H. Freedy  
Distinguished Flying Cross Association

Phyllis J. Collins  
Fleet Reserve Association

Seldon H. Freedy  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Steve L. Brooker  
Maryland Air National Guard Retirees'  
Association

Emmett R. Robert  
Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Robert J. Winton  
Military Officers Association of America

Charles E. Spahr  
Military Order of the Purple Heart

E.  
Montford Point Marines of America

M. L. Meese  
National Association for Black Veterans

Michael P. Hays  
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

Christian Andreasen  
NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

John S.  
Reserve Organization of America

Catherine L. McGraw  
Society of Military Widows

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

M. Blackwell  
Veterans of Foreign Wars