

March 29, 2024

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

SB615: General Provisions – Commemorative Days – Veteran Suicide Awareness Day
Testimony

Good morning Madam Chair Pena-Melnyk,

I am writing to you as a concerned Veteran to express my overwhelming support for Bill 615 with two amendments: (1) to change the commemorative date to **September 30th** and (2) to change word 'Awareness' to '**Prevention**' in the title.

For three years, the state of Maryland has been a part of the VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families. In November 2023, Gov Moore signed an executive order proclaiming his administration's commitment to combating Veteran Suicides in Maryland. This next step reaffirms Maryland's commitment to addressing Veteran Suicide up front.

As a retired U.S. Air Force Veteran and one who has experienced the loss of a fellow USAF active duty member to suicide...Veteran Suicide prevention is the top priority for me. Designating **September 30th** as Maryland Veterans Suicide Prevention Day affirms our state's commitment to action, destigmatizes conversations about suicide, and creating hope for those in despair. Suicide is preventable. Together we can save Veteran lives.

I respectfully request the the Health and Government Operations Committee provide a favorable report on SB 615.

Sincerely,



SMSgt(ret), Richard M. LaFleche
United States Air Force
Adjutant, Maryland Post 175, American Legion