



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 14, 2024

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

HB 408 – Mental Health Law – County Mental Health Advisory Committees – Membership - Request for a FAVORABLE Report

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

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I am providing written testimony in support of HB 408. I also currently serve on the Governors Challenge for Suicide Prevention.

This bill alters the membership of a county's mental health advisory committee by including an *individual with experience with mental health care for veterans*, or someone currently serving. Having served on active duty for 30 years, after being a military spouse, I know the challenges facing the military community. These include: long hours and high task demands, repeated exposure to trauma, danger and loss, frequent moves, spousal job loss when going through a permanent change of station move, frequent school moves for children and repeated, long deployments requiring single parenting. These stressors are similar for families of national guard members as well as federal reservist who can be called up to active duty. These stressors are unique from other regular "jobs", and include the family members, not just the service member.

The addition of a provider with experience in mental health care or the inclusion of someone currently serving makes sense. Who better to scrutinize or encourage program interventions and support services to ensure that they meet the needs of those currently serving or those who have previously served? And finally, in the current fiscal challenges of the state, this bill is procedural and has no financial requirements.

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 members¹. These are Department of Defense numbers and do not reflect the 1,200 U.S. Public Health Service or NOAA officers and their families, who also live with similar duty situations. In addition, there are 355,787 veteran

¹ [Military One Source](#), as of December 31, 2022

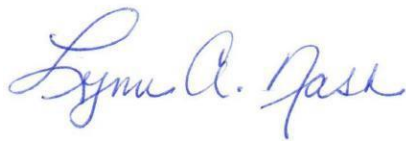
HB 408 – Mental Health Law – County Mental Health Advisory Committees –Membership

households². County mental health advisory committees should include someone with experience providing mental health services to this specific segment of the population.

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* HB 408 County Mental Health Advisory Committees - Membership and asks for your **FAVORABLE report**.

We thank Delegate Bagnall for her sponsorship of this important legislation and her continued support of the uniformed service community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn A. Nash". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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

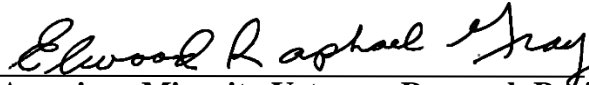
Maryland Military Coalition Member Organizations Follow

² [VA Claim Insider](#), August 10, 2023


Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition


Air Force Sergeants Association


American Military Society


American Minority Veterans Research Project

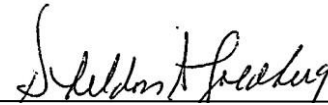

Association of the United States Navy



Commissioned Officers Association of the
US Public Health Service


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


Military Order of the Purple Heart

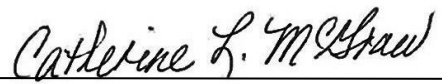

Montford Point Marines of America



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