



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

January 23, 2024

The Honorable Luke Clippinger,
Chair, Judiciary Committee
Maryland House of Delegates
Room 101 House Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Request for Favorable Report – HB 0008 – Freedom to Serve Act**

Dear Chair Clippinger and Members of the Judiciary 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 HB 0008, the Freedom to Serve Act**, sponsored by Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo. The legislation will enable permanent legal residents of the United States who were honorably discharged United States armed forces veterans, or who serve in the National Guard or Reserve, to become police officers even if they do not have a pending citizenship application. The bill passed the House in the 2023 General Assembly session.

Maryland currently has a **critical** shortage of law enforcement officers. Retirements and resignations exceed recruitment. The Chief Judge of the United States District Court for the District of Maryland stated during an interview on WJZ CBS Baltimore that the issue of police staffing shortages is “an extremely serious problem . . . (that is) not getting better, it’s getting worse.”

HB 0008 would expand the pool of potential law enforcement officers. Honorably discharged veterans and members of the National Guard and Reserve, whether or not they have a pending citizenship application, have already demonstrated their willingness to serve their country and community. They have been vetted and passed a background check and trained in safe use of weapons and rules of engagement.

Moreover, everybody who has ever served, regardless of their specialty or branch of service, has performed law enforcement functions by performing guard duty, credentials checks, and other activities. They have also been trained in civil disturbance and crowd control.

Critically, Maryland needs law enforcement officers who speak foreign languages and possess cultural sensitivity to interact with non-English speaking, immigrant populations. Veterans who are themselves immigrants will bring these vital skills and experiences, including cultural competency, to their law enforcement careers.

Various states already have enacted legislation enabling resident alien veterans to become police officers:

- Three states (Colorado, Vermont and West Virginia) have no citizenship requirement to become a police officer.
- Seven states (Hawaii, Louisiana, Minnesota, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Utah and Washington) only require permanent resident status or work authorization.

The MMC strongly supports the provision that would also **enable currently serving members of the National Guard and Reserve** to become police officers if they are permanent legal residents of the United States even if they do not have a pending citizenship application.

Members of the Guard and Reserve already live in the communities where they would serve. They undergo the exact same training as their active-duty counterparts and bring the same qualifications.

All National Guard personnel, regardless of their actual military specialty, are trained to support law enforcement and civil disturbance response. Many Maryland National Guard personnel were on duty at the Capitol after the January 6 Insurrection and were on duty in Baltimore after the death of Freddie Gray.

Civilian law enforcement recruiters could team with National Guard or Reserve recruiters to identify noncitizens with an aptitude and interest in law enforcement. They could join the Guard or Reserve, complete Initial Entry Training, join a unit and then start training to be a law enforcement officer in their community. Given that police, the National Guard and Reserve Components all face severe recruiting challenges, such a partnership could be a “win-win.”

I also want to note that my hometown, the City of Gaithersburg, America’s most diverse city, endorsed this legislation.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a non-partisan organization of 19 Veteran organizations representing over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families -- almost half of the 355,000 veterans in the State.

We want to thank Delegate Fraser-Hidalgo for his leadership on this issue. I urge the Committee to favorably report the bill.

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. 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 F. Winton
Military Officers Association of America

Charles E. Spahr
Military Order of the Purple Heart

E. J.
Montford Point Marines of America

M. L. Messer
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. J.
National Active and Retired Federal Employees
Veterans Affairs Directorate, NARFE MD

M. Blackwell
Veterans of Foreign Wars