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SB89 Health Occupations Boards – Notation of Veteran Status and Eligibility for Benefits
Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
Favorable
January 28, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee. My name is Jim Campbell, President Emeritus for AARP Maryland, former Maryland State Delegate, and chair of AARP Maryland's Veterans' committee. AARP has four area of focus serving members of the military: caregiving, fighting fraud, helping with career and employment opportunities through the Veterans and Military Spouse Job Center, and access to benefits. AARP Maryland and its 850,000 members support SB67 and thank Senators Simonaire and Jackson for sponsoring this legislation.

What SB 89 Does

- SB89 authorizes the Department of the Environment where one or more boards under its control is required to create a process that provides a notation indicating veteran status on a license, or certificate, or registration upon application and consent of a veteran.
- Notation and consent of the notation provide a mechanism for appropriate Executive Branch Agencies to contact a Veteran with information regarding eligibility for State and Federal Veterans' benefits.
- Included in this process is the consent for information of Veterans status to be communicated with appropriate Executive Branch Agencies for the purpose of sharing information and outreach regarding Veterans' benefits.

Why This Matters

Veterans serve our country and people by putting their lives and livelihoods in jeopardy to protect and preserve our democracy and quality of life. As they transition to civilian life, many will be unable to work due to injuries sustained in the line of duty. In 2023, Maryland had approximately 348,459 veterans living in the state. Of those, 83,978 or 23.8% had a service-connected disability.

Broader Context – Service-Connected Disability Status

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families 2022 Report states:

- According to the US Census, compared to civilian counterparts, veterans today are more likely to suffer from trauma-related injuries, substance abuse, and mental health disorders.
- Compared to veterans of other service eras, Post 9/11 veterans have a significantly higher chance (43%) of having a service-connected disability and to have a rating of 70% or higher (39%).

- According to the VA, in December 2022 Post 9/11 veteran claims made up 24% of the total inventory, Gulf War made up 36%, and combined Vietnam, peacetime, and other eras made up 44%.

Goals of the Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families include;

- Increase outreach to women and other marginalized veteran populations to ensure they are aware of VA benefits, healthcare, and mental health services.
- Increase outreach to caregivers, spouses, and adult children of veterans to ensure they are aware of the VA Caregiver Support Program, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, VA benefits, and other wellness resources.
- Diversify outreach to communities serving veterans to educate on VA benefits and healthcare and increase capacity to serve more veterans filing VA claims in response to the PACT Act.
- Strategically provide outreach to state agencies and local municipalities, especially in rural areas, encourage government and community organizations to screen for military service and to refer to MDVA and VA for benefits information.

In recognizing the sacrifices of veterans made for our country, AARP believes we must ensure that our veterans have the most efficient access to the benefits they are entitled to receive. SB89 will help achieve that goal and we urge a favorable report. Please feel free to contact Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451.