

Date: January 11, 2025

**The Honorable Bryan W. Simonaire**

320 James Senate Office Building

11 Bladen Street

Annapolis, MD 21401

**Subject: Support for SB0137 – Education: High School Diploma for Veterans of Armed Conflicts**

Dear Senator Simonaire,

I am writing to express my support for SB0137, *Education - High School Diploma - Veterans of Armed Conflicts*, which seeks to provide high school diplomas to veterans who have served honorably in the armed forces. This bill is a commendable initiative that acknowledges the sacrifices of our veterans and provides them with an important educational credential that can enhance their opportunities and dignity.

As a former correctional officer at our nation's only maximum-security military prison, I witnessed firsthand the profound impact of educational gaps on decision-making and overall life outcomes. Many of the individuals I encountered struggled with effective decision-making, and a lack of educational foundation often contributed to their challenges during and after their service.

While I strongly support this bill, I respectfully urge you to consider expanding its scope to include *all* veterans who served, regardless of the outcome of their military service. As someone who serves on the Education Committee, you know the transformative power of education—not just in creating opportunities but also in fostering mental and social well-being.

It is vital to recognize the diverse circumstances that lead individuals to enlist in the armed forces. Many veterans joined the military despite facing systemic or personal barriers to education. Expanding this opportunity to all veterans would acknowledge their willingness to serve and help address the inequalities they may have faced prior to their service and the challenges they might encounter after service.

This bill answers a threefold call:

1. It restores dignity to veterans by granting them the opportunity to achieve an essential educational milestone.
2. It highlights the universal importance of education as a tool for empowerment and opportunity.
3. It levels the playing field for all who choose to serve, ensuring their sacrifices are honored equally.

While military service is not for everyone, education should be. Expanding the scope of SB0137 will ensure that all veterans, regardless of their circumstances, are given the tools to succeed and thrive in civilian life.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to improving the lives of Maryland's veterans. I look forward to your response and stand ready to support any efforts to further this important initiative.

Sincerely,

LaShonda C. Henderson  
US Army Veteran  
Camp Springs, Maryland  
lashondachenderson@gmail.com