



## MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

*Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy*

January 21, 2025

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Request **UNFAVORABLE Report** – SB0246 – Maryland Veterans Trust – Assistance to Members of the Maryland National Guard

Dear Chair Feldman and distinguished members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), I write to recommend an **UNFAVORABLE report** by the Committee on **SB0246 – Maryland Veterans Trust – Assistance to Members of the Maryland National Guard**, sponsored by the Chair of this Committee at the request of the Maryland Military Department. This bill would authorize members of the Maryland National Guard, who are not veterans, to apply for financial assistance from the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund (“Trust Fund”). Currently, only veterans with either an Honorable Discharge or a General Discharge Under Honorable Conditions or other, but not a Dishonorable Charge, are eligible to apply. The Trust Fund is a nonprofit entity that was established to provide emergency financial assistance, or grants, to veterans to cover expenses such as mortgage or rent payments, utility payments, and auto and auto insurance payments. The Trust Fund’s sources of revenue are state lottery revenues, revenue received from casinos, corporate and private donors, and, starting this tax year, from the Maryland State Income Tax checkoff system.

The MMC opposes this bill for the following reasons:

- The Trust Fund was established to help veterans and their families and public and private organizations that support veterans and their families. Making National Guard members eligible to apply for financial assistance **will result in the competition for funds that should go to veterans** with greater financial need—the original and current intent of the fund.
- Making National Guard members eligible for financial assistance from the Trust Fund **could result in other public and private organizations** that support Guard members and their families **also applying for grants from the fund, further depleting dollars** that should be directed to veterans and their families.
- Making National Guard members eligible for financial assistance from the Trust Fund will **potentially further deplete the available funds before** those who manage the Trust Fund can evaluate the impact of the **State Income Tax checkoff program** that starts this tax year. The last

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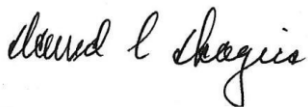
reported amount of private donations was \$12,250 in the August 2022 Trust Fund’s annual report.<sup>1</sup> The 2023 Annual Report did not disclose the amount of private donations. There is still no annual report for 2024 that includes a “detailed accounting of the Trust,” required by State Government § 9-914.2, which directs the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families to submit a report on or before August 31st each year.

- Making National Guard members eligible **excludes members of the Federal Reserve** (Army Reserve, Naval Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Coast Guard Reserve or the Ready Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service), who, too, are not veterans. They are as eligible and as deserving as their Guard counterparts. There are almost twice as many members of the Federal Reserve in Maryland-based units than there are Guard members.<sup>2</sup> The MMC believes there is no policy justification for excluding members of the Federal Reserve from being eligible to apply for financial assistance at the expense of members of the National. Their exclusion is inequitable.
- There is **another source available to members of the Maryland National Guard**. Primary among them is the EANGUS We Care for America Foundation, also known as the **National Guard Relief Foundation**. It is a 501(c)3 organization that “can provide emergency financial assistance to the men and women of the National Guard and their families who have a verified emergency need.”<sup>3</sup>
- **Maryland could establish what at least 18 other states have done:** establish a relief fund that could either serve the National Guard or military families (Attachment 1). Doing this would keep the Trust Fund dedicated to assisting the state’s veterans.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly opposes SB0246**. We believe the Trust Fund should remain dedicated to our veterans.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups, representing over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers, and survivors. Visit our website at <https://mdmilcoalition.org/>.

Respectfully



David L. Dragics  
Col (Ret), U.S. Army  
Legislative Director

Attachment

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<sup>1</sup> <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/025600/025686/20230077e.pdf>, Annual Report, Fiscal 2022.

<sup>2</sup> [https://oldcc.gov/sites/default/files/defense-spending-rpts/OLDCC\\_DSBS\\_FY2023\\_FINAL\\_WEB\\_20240929.pdf](https://oldcc.gov/sites/default/files/defense-spending-rpts/OLDCC_DSBS_FY2023_FINAL_WEB_20240929.pdf), Defense Spending by State, Fiscal Year 2023, page 58.

<sup>3</sup> <https://eangus.org/national-guard-relief-foundation/>