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Testimony for SB0246/HB0238

For Major General Janeen L. Birckhead (Senate)

Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee.

Thank you, Chairman Feldman, for serving as the primary sponsor of SB0246, which seeks to expand the Maryland Veterans Trust to include members of the Maryland National Guard and their families.

I am here today to request your support for SB0246 –

Maryland Military Department, Maryland Veterans Trust and Fund Membership.

The Maryland Veterans Trust, established by the General Assembly in 2013, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving Maryland's veterans. The Trust Fund provides individual grants for temporary financial assistance, covering expenses such as rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, and car or insurance payments—all paid directly to service providers.

Additionally, the Fund awards grants to charitable organizations offering critical services in areas like housing and food insecurity, suicide prevention, capital improvements to veteran-serving spaces, and increased access to health and wellness opportunities.

Expanding eligibility to include Maryland National Guard members is a natural progression. National Guard members, like veterans, can face temporary, non-emergency financial challenges that this Fund is uniquely equipped to address.

This proposed legislation does not alter the Trust Fund's core function but broadens its scope to better support Maryland's citizen Airmen, Soldiers, and their families.

Importantly, the Department of Veterans and Military Families fully supports this measure, as the current funding parameters can absorb the addition of Maryland National Guard members.

By including National Guard members, SB0246 ensures that these dedicated service members and their families have access to vital financial assistance during periods of difficulty.

In closing, I urge you to vote YES on SB0246 – *Maryland Military Department, Maryland Veterans Trust and Fund Membership.*

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.