



The Senate of Maryland
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 277 - "Health Equality for Servicemembers Act"

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 277.

As we know, laws are made by many different legislators and drafters over different time periods and often in a vacuum, so it makes for a hodge podge of statutes at times.

Over the interim, I did an extensive and broad dive into making our laws more consistent in terms of our service men and women. I purposely coordinated with numerous departments and various stakeholders to provide consensus legislation.

Some updates are merely updating our laws to reflect current practice, while some others are policy decisions to be inclusive of all our service members.

Different Articles of our law go to different committees in the Senate and the House of Delegates, as well as each article deals with different Departments and stakeholders that have their unique sets of challenges to overcome.

I have submitted my bills so that the subject matter resides within one Senate and one House Committee's purview.

All topics in this bill will also only be within the Health & Government Operations committee scope.

Now to SB 277 - This is consensus legislation that deals with the Health General & Health Occupations Articles and updates many of our military references to include all our 8 service branches, known as our Uniformed Services.

I am sure you are aware of 6 of the 8 branches: Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, Space Force and Coast Guard, but maybe not be as familiar with the other two uniformed services: The Public Health Service Commissioned Officer Corps (PHS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps (NOAA).

Both of these uniformed branches provide necessary protections for our nation, interact with the military branches, and go into combat zones. In fact, over 900 Commissioned Corps Officers went to Afghanistan and Iraq during the war. In addition, and for

example, PHS is on the front lines when an Ebola outbreak occurs, while NOAA coordinates their satellites with the military satellites to assist in their missions.

All 8 Uniformed Service members should receive our honor and respect, especially in Maryland law.

The two sections of this bill dealing with the Health General Article bill simply updates the 'Servicemember' definition to refer to the US Code's 'uniformed service' definition opposed to just the 'armed forces' and aligns with Federal law and thereby include all branches of the uniformed services of the United States.

I won't go over every single update, but let you read over the support testimony that's been submitted.

This bill is not creating new policy but asking to include all 8 branches where 6 branches currently receive the benefit or consideration.

The Health General Articles updates extend current benefits to all our service members, such as:

1. No fee collected for birth certificates,
2. Recording all veterans admitted to hospitals,
3. Consideration for relocation to our state or temporary deployment out of our state,
4. Making behavioral health services available, and
5. Providing access to PTSD treatments for all service members.

A recent study showed how Commissioned Corps Officers of PHS are dealing with PTSD in their stressful line of work across the world.

The other section of this bill dealing with the Health Occupations Article simply updates the 'Servicemember' definition to refer to the US Code's 'uniformed service' definition opposed to just the 'armed forces' and aligns with Federal law and thereby include all branches of the uniformed services of the United States.

The Health Occupations Article provisions updated in this Article all apply to 6 of the 8 Uniformed Service branches. This bill updates these current provisions to all 8 of our service members, such as:

1. Revising terminology so all service member spouses are treated equally,
2. Board to consider giving credits for training and education received in the Uniformed Services,

3. Board to give consideration during renewal of license when service member deployed overseas,
4. Providing the Health Occupation Board with information on culture in the Uniformed Services, and
5. Waive the optometry examination if certain standards met for all service members.

That's the bill and again, I encourage you to read the testimony to see the support we have for this legislation.

For all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration