

March 20, 2025

Senator Bryan W. Simonaire  
James Senate Office Building, Room 320  
11 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Senator Simonaire,

This letter is to strongly urge the support and passage of SB0277; Health Equality for Service Members Act in the House Hearing next week. This important proposed legislation will ensure the inclusion of all uniformed services as part of establishing rules of interpretation for "veteran" for Maryland residents.

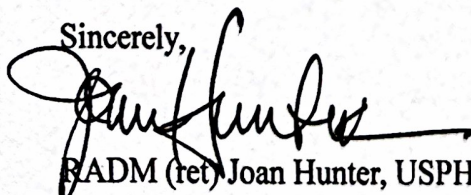
The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps was established in 1889 as a cadre of uniformed service members dedicated to serving sick and injured seamen as part of the Marine Hospital Service. Today it is a cadre of approximately 6000 trained, non-armed health professionals within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services with a mission: "...to protect, promote and advance the health and safety of our Nation." Currently the USPHS includes physicians, nurses, dentists, veterinarians, scientists and engineers who respond to the health needs of our citizens in national emergencies, they conduct medical and behavioral health research, they protect our citizens against unsafe products and provide direct healthcare to underserved communities.

As a retired Rear Admiral in the USPHS, I know the value our officers provide to our nation's citizens. Similar to other uniformed Services, USPHS officers: take the same oath of office as our Armed Service members, earn the same military rank (U.S. Navy) and pay rates, earn the same retirement pay and benefits, are covered by the GI Bill, are eligible for TRICARE military health care system and earn the same benefits and care offered by the Veterans Administration to other Service members.

In addition, the USPHS officers are ready to deploy to national emergencies, pandemics, and national disasters in order to provide clinical care, expertise and management to affected citizens. We have the same ethical standards and professional conduct as our "sister services", and are required to successfully train and maintain proficiency and readiness for deployment.

It is without hesitation I support and thank you for your effort to recognize the need for equality among all eight of our Nation's Uniformed Services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joan Hunter", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

RADM (ret) Joan Hunter, USPHS  
3678 Bay Drive  
Edgewater, MD 21037