

HOUSE BILL 494

M2, P1

5lr2422
CF SB 282

By: ~~Delegate Allen~~ **Delegates Allen, Guyton, Holmes, Lehman, and R. Lewis**

Introduced and read first time: January 20, 2025

Assigned to: Environment and Transportation

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

House action: Adopted

Read second time: March 2, 2025

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Recreational Equality for Service Members Act**

3 FOR the purpose of establishing rules of interpretation related to the uniformed services;
4 altering the rule of interpretation for “veteran”; altering the application of certain
5 provisions of law governing natural resources to apply to all uniformed services,
6 rather than only the armed forces; altering the circumstances under which licenses
7 for fishing in tidal waters do not lapse; authorizing active service members, veterans,
8 and vehicles of which an active service member or veteran is an occupant to enter a
9 State park without paying a certain fee; and generally relating to service members
10 and veterans.

11 BY adding to
12 Article – General Provisions
13 Section 1–101.1, 1–101.2, 1–103.1, 1–114.1, 1–114.2, and 1–116
14 Annotated Code of Maryland
15 (2019 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

16 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
17 Article – General Provisions
18 Section 1–117
19 Annotated Code of Maryland
20 (2019 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

21 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
22 Article – Natural Resources

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.

Underlining indicates amendments to bill.

~~Strike out~~ indicates matter stricken from the bill by amendment or deleted from the law by amendment.



1 Section 1-106, 1-405(a), (b), and (d)(3) and (10), 4-217(b)(1), 4-604(c)(2), 4-607,
2 4-705, and 4-745(c)(5) and (e)(1), 10-301(c)(1)(ii) and (iii), and 10-303
3 Annotated Code of Maryland
4 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

5 BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,
6 Article – Natural Resources
7 Section 1-405(c) and (d)(1) and (2) and 4-745(e)(2) and (3)
8 Annotated Code of Maryland
9 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

10 BY adding to
11 Article – Natural Resources
12 Section 5-1014 and 5-1015
13 Annotated Code of Maryland
14 (2023 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

15 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
16 Article – State Government
17 Section 9-901
18 Annotated Code of Maryland
19 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

20 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,
21 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

22 **Article – General Provisions**

23 **1-101.1.**

24 **“ACTIVE DUTY” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 9-901 OF THE STATE**
25 **GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.**

26 **1-101.2.**

27 **“ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 9-901 OF THE**
28 **STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.**

29 **1-103.1.**

30 **“ARMED FORCES” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 9-901 OF THE STATE**
31 **GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.**

32 **1-114.1.**

1 permit or certificate application. An informational meeting is not a contested case hearing
2 nor an agency hearing under § 10–202(d) of the State Government Article.

3 [(c)] (F) “Public hearing” means a meeting, open to the public, at which the
4 Department of Natural Resources receives oral and written comments concerning a
5 decision to issue or deny a permit or certificate. A public hearing is not a contested case
6 hearing nor an agency hearing under § 10–202(d) of the State Government Article.

7 (G) “SERVICE MEMBER” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 9–901 OF THE
8 STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.

9 (H) “UNIFORMED SERVICES” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 9–901 OF THE
10 STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.

11 (I) “VETERAN” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN § 9–901 OF THE STATE
12 GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.

13 1–405.

14 (a) (1) In this section the following words have the meanings indicated.

15 (2) “Eligible sponsor organization” means a nonprofit charitable
16 organization that provides any of the following opportunities for Gold Star recipients,
17 disabled veterans or other veterans who could benefit from one of the opportunities
18 provided, disabled **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of the United States] or other
19 **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of the United States] who could benefit from one
20 of the opportunities provided, or permanently disabled persons who require the use of a
21 wheelchair:

22 (i) Recreational hunting or fishing, including providing at no cost:

23 1. An angler’s license and trout stamps;

24 2. A Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license; or

25 3. A hunting license and any corresponding stamps;

26 (ii) Recreational water activities;

27 (iii) Other recreational outdoor activities;

28 (iv) Therapeutic outdoor activities; or

29 (v) Workforce training for green jobs, including outdoor agricultural
30 jobs.

1 (3) “Gold Star recipient” means a recipient of the U.S. Department of
2 Defense Gold Star for surviving spouses, parents, and next of kin of members of the armed
3 forces [of the United States] who lost their lives in combat.

4 (b) (1) (i) Subject to subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph, the Chesapeake
5 Bay Trust may use the Healing Hunting and Fishing Fund established under subsection
6 (d) of this section to make grants to eligible sponsor organizations.

7 (ii) In awarding a grant to an eligible sponsor organization that
8 provides opportunities that the eligible sponsor organization believes benefit veterans or
9 **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of the United States], the Chesapeake Bay Trust
10 shall determine whether the opportunities provided by the eligible sponsor organization
11 will, in fact, benefit veterans or **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of the United
12 States].

13 (2) A grant awarded under this subsection may be used only to pay capital,
14 operational, or programming costs incurred by an eligible sponsor organization in providing
15 any of the following opportunities:

16 (i) Recreational hunting or fishing, including providing at no cost:

17 1. An angler’s license and trout stamps;

18 2. A Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license; or

19 3. A hunting license and any corresponding stamps;

20 (ii) Recreational water activities;

21 (iii) Other recreational outdoor activities;

22 (iv) Therapeutic outdoor activities; or

23 (v) Workforce training for green jobs, including outdoor agricultural
24 jobs.

25 (c) The Department shall adopt regulations to implement this section, including
26 regulations establishing eligibility requirements for applicants for grants to eligible
27 sponsor organizations.

28 (d) (1) In this subsection, “Fund” means the Healing Hunting and Fishing
29 Fund.

30 (2) There is a Healing Hunting and Fishing Fund.

31 (3) The purpose of the Fund is to provide any of the following opportunities
32 for Gold Star recipients, disabled veterans or other veterans who could benefit from one of

1 the opportunities, disabled **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of the United States]
2 or other **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of the United States] who could benefit
3 from one of the opportunities, and permanently disabled persons who require the use of a
4 wheelchair:

- 5 (i) Recreational hunting or fishing, including providing at no cost:
- 6 1. An angler's license and trout stamps;
- 7 2. A Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license; or
- 8 3. A hunting license and any corresponding stamps;
- 9 (ii) Recreational water activities;
- 10 (iii) Other recreational outdoor activities;
- 11 (iv) Therapeutic outdoor activities; or
- 12 (v) Workforce training for green jobs, including outdoor agricultural
13 jobs.

14 (10) Money expended from the Fund for grants to eligible sponsor
15 organizations is supplemental to and is not intended to take the place of funding that
16 otherwise would be appropriated for any of the opportunities specified under subsection
17 (b)(2) of this section that are provided to Gold Star recipients, disabled veterans or other
18 veterans who could benefit from one of the opportunities, disabled **SERVICE** members [of
19 the armed forces of the United States] or other **SERVICE** members [of the armed forces of
20 the United States] who could benefit from one of the opportunities, or permanently disabled
21 persons who require the use of a wheelchair.

22 4-217.

23 (b) (1) The Department may issue an annual license exemption to a
24 governmental entity or a nonprofit organization to:

25 (i) Take individuals with physical or mental disabilities who are
26 [serving or have served in the armed forces of the United States] **VETERANS OR ACTIVE**
27 **SERVICE MEMBERS** fishing in the tidal or nontidal waters of the State; or

28 (ii) Provide fishing clinics and instructional opportunities to:

29 1. Individuals who are [serving or have served in the armed
30 forces of the United States] **VETERANS OR ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBERS**;

1 (ii) Whose state of residence extends similar privileges to former
2 prisoners of war, American veterans who the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
3 determines are unemployable, or 100% service connected disabled American veterans of
4 this State.

5 (b) Not more than 20 complimentary angler's licenses for each state other than
6 Maryland shall be outstanding at any time.

7 (c) A complimentary angler's license is not transferable and shall be issued
8 without a fee.

9 (d) For the purposes of this section, "former prisoner of war" means a person who,
10 while [serving in the active military, naval, or air service of the United States] AN ACTIVE
11 SERVICE MEMBER, was forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by an enemy
12 government or its agents, or a hostile force, during a period of armed conflict.

13 4-705.

14 (A) A license does not lapse if the licensee fails to renew or make bona fide use of
15 [his] **THE** license because of [induction or enlistment into] **THE LICENSEE'S**
16 **DEPLOYMENT IN** the [armed forces] **UNIFORMED SERVICES** or employment in essential
17 war industries[, and the].

18 (B) **THE** licensee [applies] **SHALL INFORM THE DEPARTMENT BEFORE THE**
19 **LICENSEE'S DEPLOYMENT AND APPLY** to the Department for the renewal of [his] **THE**
20 license within [one] 1 year of the termination of hostilities or from the date of [his] **THE**
21 **LICENSEE'S** release from **DEPLOYMENT IN** the [armed forces] **UNIFORMED SERVICES**.

22 (C) If a licensee cannot fish every net for which [he] **THE LICENSEE** was licensed
23 at any time during a war emergency because of some condition arising out of a war, [he]
24 **THE LICENSEE** may not be deprived of [his] **THE** right to a license for these nets thereafter.

25 4-745.

26 (c) A person may fish for finfish in the Chesapeake Bay or its tidal tributaries or
27 in State waters of the Atlantic Ocean and coastal bays and their tributaries without a
28 Chesapeake Bay and coastal sport fishing license if the person:

29 (5) Is a resident [serving in the armed forces of the United States] **WHO IS**
30 **AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER** while on leave in the State, during the resident's leave
31 period, if, while fishing, the resident possesses a copy of the resident's official leave order;

32 (e) (1) In this subsection, "former prisoner of war" means a person who, while
33 [serving in the active military, naval, or air service of the United States] **AN ACTIVE**

1 **SERVICE MEMBER**, was forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by an enemy
2 government or its agents, or a hostile force, during a period of armed conflict.

3 (2) The Department may issue a lifetime complimentary Chesapeake Bay
4 and coastal sport fishing license to any Maryland resident who certifies that the resident
5 is:

6 (i) A former prisoner of war;

7 (ii) An American veteran who the U.S. Department of Veterans
8 Affairs determines is unemployable; or

9 (iii) A 100% service connected disabled American veteran.

10 (3) The Department may issue a lifetime complimentary Chesapeake Bay
11 and coastal sport fishing license to an out-of-state person:

12 (i) Who certifies that the person is:

13 1. A former prisoner of war;

14 2. An American veteran who the U.S. Department of
15 Veterans Affairs determines is unemployable; or

16 3. A 100% service connected disabled American veteran; and

17 (ii) Whose state of residence extends similar privileges to former
18 prisoners of war, American veterans who the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
19 determines are unemployable, or 100% service connected disabled American veterans of
20 this State.

21 **5-1014.**

22 (A) **ON PRESENTATION OF A VALID UNIFORMED SERVICES IDENTIFICATION**
23 **CARD BY AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER OR ANY MEMBER OF THE MARYLAND**
24 **NATIONAL GUARD:**

25 (1) **AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER OR ANY MEMBER OF THE**
26 **MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD** MAY ENTER A STATE PARK WITHOUT PAYING ANY
27 DAY-USE ENTRY FEE THAT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED; AND

28 (2) **A VEHICLE OF WHICH AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER OR ANY**
29 **MEMBER OF THE MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD** IS AN OCCUPANT MAY ENTER A
30 STATE PARK WITHOUT PAYING ANY PER-VEHICLE FEE THAT HAS BEEN
31 ESTABLISHED.

1 (B) THIS SECTION DOES NOT EXEMPT AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER, ANY
2 MEMBER OF THE MARYLAND NATIONAL GUARD, OR ANY OTHER INDIVIDUAL FROM
3 PAYING OTHER FACILITY USE SERVICES FEES NOT DESCRIBED IN SUBSECTION (A)
4 OF THIS SECTION.

5 **5-1015.**

6 (A) ON PRESENTATION OF A VALID VETERAN IDENTIFICATION CARD, A
7 DRIVER'S LICENSE THAT INDICATES THE LICENSE HOLDER IS A VETERAN, OR ANY
8 OTHER FORM OF IDENTIFICATION ACCEPTED BY THE DEPARTMENT THAT
9 ESTABLISHES THE HOLDER'S VETERAN STATUS:

10 (1) A VETERAN MAY ENTER A STATE PARK WITHOUT PAYING ANY
11 DAY-USE ENTRY FEE THAT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED; AND

12 (2) A VEHICLE OF WHICH A VETERAN IS AN OCCUPANT MAY ENTER A
13 STATE PARK WITHOUT PAYING ANY PER-VEHICLE FEE THAT HAS BEEN
14 ESTABLISHED.

15 (B) THIS SECTION DOES NOT EXEMPT A VETERAN OR OTHER INDIVIDUAL
16 FROM PAYING ANY OTHER FACILITY USE SERVICES FEES NOT DESCRIBED IN
17 SUBSECTION (A) OF THIS SECTION.

18 10-301.

19 (c) (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the following
20 persons are not required to obtain a hunter's license, bow and arrow stamp, black powder
21 stamp, bonus antlered deer stamp, or sika deer stamp:

22 (ii) Any resident [serving in the armed forces of the United States]
23 WHO IS AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER while on leave in the State, during the resident's
24 leave period, if, while hunting, the resident possesses a copy of the resident's official leave
25 order;

26 (iii) Any person [serving in the armed forces of the United States]
27 who IS AN ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER AND has a service-connected disability, if, while
28 hunting, the person possesses valid military identification; and

29 10-303.

30 (a) (1) The Department annually may issue a complimentary hunting license
31 to the President of the United States, the governor of any state, or an official or an
32 enforcement officer of the game and fish management agency of another state which
33 reciprocally offers complimentary hunting licenses.

1 (2) (i) Subject to the requirements of § 10–301.1 of this subtitle, the
 2 Department may issue a lifetime complimentary hunting license to a Maryland resident
 3 who certifies that the resident is:

4 1. A former prisoner of war;

5 2. An American veteran who the U.S. Department of
 6 Veterans Affairs determines is unemployable; or

7 3. A 100% service connected disabled American veteran.

8 (ii) Subject to the requirements of § 10–301.1 of this subtitle, the
 9 Department may issue a lifetime complimentary hunting license to an out-of-state person:

10 1. Who certifies that the person is:

11 A. A former prisoner of war;

12 B. An American veteran who the U.S. Department of
 13 Veterans Affairs determines is unemployable; or

14 C. A 100% service connected disabled American veteran; and

15 2. Whose state of residence extends similar privileges to
 16 former prisoners of war, American veterans who the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
 17 determines are unemployable, or 100% service connected disabled American veterans of
 18 this State.

19 (3) A complimentary license is not transferable.

20 (b) For the purposes of this section, “former prisoner of war” means a person who,
 21 while [serving in the active military, naval, or air service of the United States] AN ACTIVE
 22 SERVICE MEMBER, was forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by an enemy
 23 government or its agents, or a hostile force, during a period of armed conflict.

24 Article – State Government

25 9–901.

26 (a) In this subtitle the following words have the meanings indicated.

27 **(B) “ACTIVE DUTY” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C. § 101.**

28 **(C) “ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS:**

29 **(1) AN ACTIVE DUTY MEMBER OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES; OR**

1 **(2) SERVING IN A RESERVE COMPONENT OF THE UNIFORMED**
2 **SERVICES ON ACTIVE DUTY ORDERS.**

3 **(D) “ARMED FORCES” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 10 U.S.C. § 101.**

4 **[(b)] (E)** “Board” means the Board of Trustees of the Maryland Veterans Trust.

5 **[(c)] (F)** “Department” means the Department of Veterans and Military
6 Families.

7 **(G) “MILITARY FAMILY” INCLUDES THE SPOUSE AND DEPENDENT**
8 **CHILDREN OF A SERVICE MEMBER OR VETERAN RELATED BY BLOOD, MARRIAGE, OR**
9 **ADOPTION.**

10 **(H) “RESERVE COMPONENT” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C. § 101.**

11 **[(d)] (I)** “Secretary” means the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families.

12 **(J) “SERVICE MEMBER” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS A MEMBER OF:**

13 **(1) THE UNIFORMED SERVICES; OR**

14 **(2) A RESERVE COMPONENT OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES.**

15 **[(e)] (K)** “Trust” means the Maryland Veterans Trust.

16 **(L) “UNIFORMED SERVICES” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C. § 101.**

17 **[(f)] (M)** Except as otherwise provided in this subtitle, “veteran” [means an
18 individual who served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States, other than
19 for training, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable] **HAS**
20 **THE MEANING STATED IN 38 U.S.C. § 101.**

21 SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect
22 October 1, 2025.