

SENATE BILL 6

P1

(PRE-FILED)

5l0971
CF HB 142

By: **Senator Salling**

Requested: September 26, 2024

Introduced and read first time: January 8, 2025

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

A BILL ENTITLED

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **State Government – Veterans and Military Families Ombudsman –**
3 **Establishment**

4 FOR the purpose of establishing the Veterans and Military Families Ombudsman within
5 the Department of Veterans and Military Families; and generally relating to the
6 Veterans and Military Families Ombudsman.

7 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,

8 Article – State Government

9 Section 9–901

10 Annotated Code of Maryland

11 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

12 BY adding to

13 Article – State Government

14 Section 9–960 through 9–964 to be under the new part “Part IX. Veterans and
15 Military Families Ombudsman”

16 Annotated Code of Maryland

17 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

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

20 **Article – State Government**

21 9–901.

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

23 (b) “Board” means the Board of Trustees of the Maryland Veterans Trust.

EXPLANATION: CAPITALS INDICATE MATTER ADDED TO EXISTING LAW.

[Brackets] indicate matter deleted from existing law.



(c) “Department” means the Department of Veterans and Military Families.

(D) “OMBUDSMAN” MEANS THE VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES OMBUDSMAN.

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

[(e)] (F) “Trust” means the Maryland Veterans Trust.

[(f)] (G) Except as otherwise provided in this subtitle, “veteran” means an individual who served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States, other than for training, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

PART IX. VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES OMBUDSMAN.

9–960.

(A) THERE IS A VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES OMBUDSMAN IN THE DEPARTMENT.

(B) THE PURPOSE OF THE OMBUDSMAN IS TO SERVE AS A RESOURCE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT TO VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES REGARDING THEIR RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO SERVICES.

9–961.

(A) (1) THE SECRETARY SHALL APPOINT THE OMBUDSMAN.

(2) THE OMBUDSMAN SERVES FOR A TERM OF 5 YEARS.

(3) THE SECRETARY MAY REMOVE THE OMBUDSMAN FOR CAUSE.

(B) SALARIES OF THE OMBUDSMAN AND STAFF UNDER THE OMBUDSMAN AND EXPENSES RELATED TO THE OPERATION OF THE TOLL-FREE NUMBER ESTABLISHED UNDER § 9–963 OF THIS PART, RENT, EQUIPMENT, SUPPLIES, AND GENERAL OPERATIONS SHALL BE AS PROVIDED IN THE STATE BUDGET.

(C) (1) IN COOPERATION WITH THE SECRETARY OF BUDGET AND MANAGEMENT, AND SUBJECT TO PARAGRAPH (2) OF THIS SUBSECTION, THE SECRETARY SHALL SET MINIMUM SALARY, QUALIFICATIONS, AND EXPERIENCE STANDARDS FOR THE OMBUDSMAN AND ANY STAFF UNDER THE OMBUDSMAN.

(2) THE OMBUDSMAN SHALL BE A VETERAN.

1 **9-962.**

2 (A) **THE OMBUDSMAN SHALL:**

3 (1) **SERVE AS A SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE ON THE STATE AND FEDERAL**
4 **LAWS, RULES, AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES;**

5 (2) **PROVIDE IMPARTIAL INFORMATION TO VETERANS AND MILITARY**
6 **FAMILIES ON HOW TO NAVIGATE THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING SERVICES;**

7 (3) **EXPLAIN TO VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES THEIR RIGHTS**
8 **AND HOW THEY MAY AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THOSE RIGHTS;**

9 (4) **WORK NEUTRALLY WITH THE DEPARTMENT AND OTHER**
10 **ENTITIES, INCLUDING PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS, TO ENSURE THAT SERVICES FOR**
11 **VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES ARE PROVIDED AS INTENDED;**

12 (5) **ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES;**

13 (6) **COMMUNICATE WITH THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE NEEDS OF**
14 **VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES;**

15 (7) **IDENTIFY ANY PATTERNS OF COMPLAINTS MADE BY VETERANS**
16 **AND MILITARY FAMILIES AND INFORM THE DEPARTMENT ABOUT ANY PATTERN; AND**

17 (8) **SERVE AS A GENERAL RESOURCE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY**
18 **FAMILIES AND MAKE REFERRALS TO AVAILABLE STATE AND FEDERAL SERVICES**
19 **AND PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.**

20 (B) **IN PERFORMING THE DUTIES ASSIGNED UNDER THIS SECTION, THE**
21 **OMBUDSMAN SHALL TREAT ALL COMMUNICATIONS AS CONFIDENTIAL AND MAY**
22 **REVEAL THE DETAILS OF ANY COMMUNICATION ONLY IF:**

23 (1) **NECESSARY TO ACHIEVE THE OMBUDSMAN'S DUTIES; AND**

24 (2) **DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH APPLICABLE STATE AND FEDERAL**
25 **LAW.**

26 **9-963.**

27 **THE OMBUDSMAN SHALL ARRANGE FOR A TOLL-FREE TELEPHONE NUMBER,**
28 **AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH AS WELL AS OTHER APPROPRIATE LANGUAGES, TO ASSIST**

1 ANY INDIVIDUAL SEEKING INFORMATION OR ADVICE ABOUT SERVICES AND
2 PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.

3 **9-964.**

4 ON OR BEFORE JULY 1, 2026, AND EACH JULY 1 THEREAFTER, THE
5 OMBUDSMAN SHALL SUBMIT A REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND, IN ACCORDANCE
6 WITH § 2-1257 OF THIS ARTICLE, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY THAT INCLUDES:

7 (1) THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF CALLS RECEIVED ON THE TOLL-FREE
8 NUMBER DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR;

9 (2) ANY PATTERNS OF COMPLAINTS MADE BY VETERANS AND
10 MILITARY FAMILIES IDENTIFIED UNDER § 9-962(A)(7) OF THIS SUBTITLE;

11 (3) A SUMMARY OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE OMBUDSMAN
12 DURING THE PREVIOUS YEAR; AND

13 (4) ANY RECOMMENDATIONS THE OMBUDSMAN DETERMINES ARE
14 APPROPRIATE AND NECESSARY CONCERNING THE STATE'S PROVISION OF SERVICES
15 AND PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.

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