

SENATE BILL 309

P1

5lr1409

By: ~~Senator Simonaire~~ Senators Simonaire, Brooks, and Carozza

Introduced and read first time: January 13, 2025

Assigned to: Education, Energy, and the Environment

Committee Report: Favorable with amendments

Senate action: Adopted

Read second time: February 25, 2025

CHAPTER _____

1 AN ACT concerning

2 **Department of Veterans and Military Families – ~~Online Registry~~**
3 **Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program – Alterations**

4 FOR the purpose of requiring the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program in
5 the Department of Veterans and Military Families to ~~establish and maintain an~~
6 ~~online registry to provide veterans, military families, and interested individuals with~~
7 ~~certain information~~ expand certain services to include service members and their
8 families; requiring the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families to include certain
9 information ~~about the online registry~~ in a certain annual report; and generally
10 relating to veterans and military families.

11 BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments,
12 Article – State Government
13 Section ~~9–901, 9–940, 9–942, 9–943,~~ and 9–946(7) and (8)
14 Annotated Code of Maryland
15 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

16 ~~BY repealing and reenacting, without amendments,~~
17 ~~Article – State Government~~
18 ~~Section ~~9–940(a)~~~~
19 ~~Annotated Code of Maryland~~
20 ~~(2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)~~

21 BY adding to
22 Article – State Government

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 ~~9-945 and~~ 9-946(8)
 2 Annotated Code of Maryland
 3 (2021 Replacement Volume and 2024 Supplement)

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

6 **Article – State Government**

7 9-901.

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

9 ~~(b) “ACTIVE DUTY” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C. § 101.~~

10 ~~(c) “ACTIVE SERVICE MEMBER” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS:~~

11 ~~(1) AN ACTIVE DUTY MEMBER OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES; OR~~

12 ~~(2) SERVING IN A RESERVE COMPONENT OF THE UNIFORMED~~
 13 ~~SERVICES ON ACTIVE DUTY ORDERS.~~

14 ~~(d) “ARMED FORCES” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 10 U.S.C. § 101.~~

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

16 ~~[(c)] (F)~~ “Department” means the Department of Veterans and Military
 17 Families.

18 ~~(g) “MILITARY FAMILY” INCLUDES THE SPOUSE AND DEPENDENT~~
 19 ~~CHILDREN OF A SERVICE MEMBER OR VETERAN RELATED BY BLOOD, MARRIAGE, OR~~
 20 ~~ADOPTION.~~

21 ~~(h)~~ (D) “RESERVE COMPONENT” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C.
 22 § 101.

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

24 ~~(j)~~ (F) “SERVICE MEMBER” MEANS AN INDIVIDUAL WHO IS A MEMBER OF:

25 (1) THE UNIFORMED SERVICES; OR

26 (2) A RESERVE COMPONENT OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES.

27 ~~[(e)]~~ (G) “Trust” means the Maryland Veterans Trust.

1 ~~(H)~~ **(H)** **“UNIFORMED SERVICES” HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C.**
2 **§ 101.**

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

7 9–940.

8 (a) In this part, “Program” means the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy
9 Program.

10 (b) There is a Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program in the
11 Department.

12 (c) The purpose of the Program is to ensure that:

13 (1) veterans, SERVICE MEMBERS, AND THEIR FAMILIES are informed of
14 the services, benefits, and assistance available to them from the State and federal
15 government and community organizations; and

16 (2) general issues relating to veterans’, SERVICE MEMBERS’, AND THEIR
17 FAMILIES’ needs are brought to the attention of the Governor and the General Assembly
18 in order for them to be addressed.

19 9–942.

20 (a) The Program shall actively help veterans, SERVICE MEMBERS, and their
21 dependents become aware of and access any service or benefit to which they are entitled
22 including:

23 (1) tax benefits;

24 (2) health care benefits;

25 (3) disability benefits; and

26 (4) pension benefits.

27 (b) The Program, in collaboration with the Maryland Higher Education
28 Commission, shall actively help veterans, SERVICE MEMBERS, and their dependents
29 become aware of and access education and training benefits to which they are entitled.

30 (c) The director of the Program shall:

1 (1) support veterans, SERVICE MEMBERS, and their dependents through
2 the service or benefit process; and

3 (2) refer veterans, [veterans'] SERVICE MEMBERS, THEIR dependents,
4 and [veterans'] THEIR survivors to the appropriate governmental unit for claim assistance.
5 9-943.

6 (a) (1) For the purposes of reaching any veteran, [veteran's] SERVICE
7 MEMBER, dependent OF A VETERAN OR SERVICE MEMBER, or [veteran's] survivor OF A
8 VETERAN OR SERVICE MEMBER in need of assistance in obtaining services or benefits
9 granted by the law, the director shall develop and implement a communications and
10 outreach plan.

11 (2) In order to carry out the director's responsibilities under paragraph (1)
12 of this subsection, the director may:

13 (i) enter into contracts; and

14 (ii) work with governmental units and community-based
15 organizations, including the Maryland Department of Health, the Department of Aging,
16 faith-based groups, veterans groups, senior centers, adult day care centers, institutions of
17 higher education, and other entities the director considers appropriate.

18 (b) (1) The director shall develop mechanisms for outreach to be disseminated
19 by direct mail and through community-based veterans organizations, the Department, the
20 Department of Human Services, the Maryland Department of Health, and any other State
21 agency or unit the director considers appropriate.

22 (2) Communication mechanisms shall include:

23 (i) designing marketing materials describing the services provided
24 by the Program;

25 (ii) a regular electronic newsletter;

26 (iii) brochures describing various benefits or any other issue or
27 benefit of interest to veterans, SERVICE MEMBERS, or their dependents; and

28 (iv) other measures the director considers appropriate.

29 (c) The Department shall communicate welcome home information to veterans
30 AND SERVICE MEMBERS returning to the State.

1 (d) The Department, in conjunction with the types of community-based
2 organizations listed in subsection (a)(2) of this section, shall develop communication tools
3 to assist in identifying veterans, SERVICE MEMBERS, and dependents who may be eligible
4 for benefits and programs offered by the Department.

5 (e) The Program shall:

6 (1) manage the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program and Fund
7 established under Part VIII of this subtitle;

8 (2) coordinate the responsibilities of veterans' services specialists
9 designated under § 9-944 of this subtitle; and

10 (3) manage Department media relations, web content, social media,
11 internal and external communications, customer service training, and intergovernmental
12 relations.

13 (f) The director shall serve, as necessary, as the Secretary's designee to
14 appropriate commissions, workgroups, and councils.

15 ~~9-945.~~

16 ~~(A) ON OR BEFORE DECEMBER 31, 2025, THE PROGRAM SHALL ESTABLISH~~
17 ~~AND MAINTAIN AN ONLINE REGISTRY TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO REGISTERED~~
18 ~~INDIVIDUALS.~~

19 ~~(B) THE REGISTRY SHALL:~~

20 ~~(1) ALLOW AN INDIVIDUAL TO REGISTER;~~

21 ~~(2) PROVIDE REGISTERED INDIVIDUALS INFORMATION, INCLUDING~~
22 ~~AVAILABLE SERVICES, BENEFITS, AND NEWS THAT IMPACTS VETERANS, SERVICE~~
23 ~~MEMBERS, MILITARY FAMILIES, AND OTHER INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS;~~

24 ~~(3) ALLOW A REGISTERED INDIVIDUAL TO UPDATE THEIR ONLINE~~
25 ~~REGISTRY INFORMATION INCLUDING THE INDIVIDUAL'S NAME, E-MAIL ADDRESS,~~
26 ~~AND OPTIONAL STATUSES; AND~~

27 ~~(4) HAVE THE CAPABILITY TO IMPORT SHAREABLE REGISTRATION~~
28 ~~DATA PROVIDED BY OTHER AUTHORIZED UNITS OF STATE GOVERNMENT.~~

29 ~~(C) THE PROGRAM:~~

30 ~~(1) SHALL REQUIRE AN INDIVIDUAL REGISTERING WITH THE ONLINE~~
31 ~~REGISTRY TO PROVIDE THE INDIVIDUAL'S NAME AND EMAIL ADDRESS; AND~~

1 ~~(2) SHALL REQUEST THAT AN INDIVIDUAL REGISTERING WITH THE~~
 2 ~~ONLINE REGISTRY PROVIDE THE FOLLOWING OPTIONAL STATUS INFORMATION:~~

3 ~~(I) WHETHER THE INDIVIDUAL IS A VETERAN;~~

4 ~~(II) WHETHER THE INDIVIDUAL IS CURRENTLY ON ACTIVE~~
 5 ~~DUTY;~~

6 ~~(III) WHETHER THE INDIVIDUAL IS A MEMBER OF:~~

7 ~~1. THE UNIFORMED SERVICES;~~

8 ~~2. A RESERVE COMPONENT; OR~~

9 ~~3. THE MARYLAND DEFENSE FORCE; AND~~

10 ~~(IV) IF THE INDIVIDUAL IS NOT A VETERAN OR MEMBER AS~~
 11 ~~DESCRIBED IN ITEM (III) OF THIS ITEM, WHETHER THE INDIVIDUAL IS:~~

12 ~~1. A SPOUSE OF A MEMBER OR VETERAN;~~

13 ~~2. A DEPENDENT CHILD OF A MEMBER OR VETERAN; OR~~

14 ~~3. ANY OTHER INTERESTED INDIVIDUAL.~~

15 9-946.

16 The Secretary shall submit a report by December 31 of each year to the Governor
 17 and, in accordance with § 2-1257 of this article, the General Assembly, that includes:

18 (7) the status of federal veterans programs as they relate to Maryland
 19 veterans; [and]

20 ~~(8) A REPORT ON THE ONLINE REGISTRY INCLUDING:~~

21 ~~(I) THE TOTAL NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ON THE REGISTRY;~~

22 ~~(II) THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ON THE REGISTRY LISTED BY~~
 23 ~~STATUSES, INCLUDING THOSE WITH AN UNDECLARED STATUS;~~

24 ~~(III) THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS ADDED TO THE REGISTRY IN~~
 25 ~~THE PREVIOUS YEAR; AND~~

1 ~~(IV) THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS THAT UNSUBSCRIBED OR~~
2 ~~WERE REMOVED FROM THE REGISTRY IN THE PREVIOUS YEAR; AND~~

3 (8) A GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION METHODS
4 UTILIZED IN SUPPORT OF THE COMMUNICATIONS, OUTREACH, AND ADVOCACY
5 PROGRAM; AND

6 [(8)] (9) any other issues concerning veterans that the Secretary
7 considers appropriate.

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

Approved:

Governor.

President of the Senate.

Speaker of the House of Delegates.