

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 281 (Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Judicial Proceedings and Education, Energy,
and the Environment

Transportation Equality for Service Members Act

This bill generally establishes uniform definitions related to the military in the General Provisions, State Government, and Transportation Articles of the Maryland Code, primarily by reference to definitions in the U.S. Code. While certain alterations within the bill represent only stylistic or technical changes, there are substantive changes. These changes generally make certain provisions within the Transportation Article applicable to all members of the *uniformed services*, thereby expanding eligibility for certain benefits (*e.g.*, special registration plates, license expirations/renewals, emissions exemptions, etc.).

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Since it is assumed that this bill applies in a limited number of cases, State finances, including those of the Transportation Trust Fund, are not materially affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary/Current Law:

Definitions

The bill adds the definition of several military terms to State Government § 9-901. This includes the definition of “military family” as well as all of the terms found in **Exhibit 1** below. “Military family” includes the spouse and dependent children of a service member or veteran related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Exhibit 1
Repeated Military Definitions Added to State Government § 9-901

Term	U.S. Code Reference	Definition
Active duty	37 U.S.C. § 101	Full-time duty in the active service of a uniformed service, including full-time training duty, annual training duty, full-time National Guard duty, and attendance, while in the active service, at a school designated as a service school by law or the relevant Secretary
Active service member	N/A	An individual who is (1) an active-duty member of the uniformed services or (2) serving in a reserve component of the uniformed services on active-duty orders
Armed forces	10 U.S.C. § 101	Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard
Reserve component	37 U.S.C. § 101	The Army National Guard of the United States, the Army Reserve, the Navy Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Air National Guard of the United States, the Air Force Reserve, the Coast Guard Reserve, or the Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service
Service member	N/A	An individual who is a member of (1) the uniformed services or (2) a reserve component of the uniformed services
Uniformed services	37 U.S.C. § 101	Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Public Health Service
Veteran	38 U.S.C. § 101	A person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released under non-dishonorable conditions

Source: Department of Legislative Services

Maryland Vehicle Law Provisions

The contribution of the U.S. Armed Forces is recognized through several provisions within the Maryland Vehicle Law. For example, Maryland has exemptions from registration fees for veterans with certain disabilities and vehicles owned by national veterans' organizations as well as special registration plates for honorably discharged veterans; recipients of individually earned, combat-related U.S. Armed Forces medals; and recipients of a U.S. Department of Defense Gold Star indicating status as a surviving spouse, parent, or next of kin of a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who lost his or her life in combat. The bill expands certain provisions to apply more broadly.

Recipients of an Individually Earned Combat-related Armed Forces Medal: Under the bill, special registration plates for recipients of an individually earned combat-related, armed forces medal are also made available to recipients of a *non-combat-related uniformed services medal of the highest levels*. Current law also requires satisfactory proof that the applicant is an *honorably discharged* veteran; the bill alters the requirement so that the applicant must be a veteran (as defined above), thereby including eligible individuals who received a non-dishonorable discharge or release. Further, the requirement under current law for the Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to consult with the U.S. Department of Defense regarding qualifying medals is expanded to include consultation with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service (PHS), the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and appropriate representatives of the various branches of the *uniformed services*.

Disabled Veterans: Under current law, the owner of a motor vehicle (or a lessee) may apply to MVA for a special disabled veteran registration plate for certain vehicle classes. To be eligible, an applicant must be an *armed forces* veteran. The bill repeals the reference to the *armed forces*; as a result, any veteran who meets other existing criteria for a special disabled veteran registration plate may apply under the bill.

Excise Taxes: Under current law, a vehicle is exempt from the excise tax imposed on original certificates of title if, in addition to other requirements, the vehicle is owned by a member of *the military on active duty* or who returns to the State from active duty, with "military" defined for this purpose as including PHS and NOAA. Under the bill, *active service members* or *service members* who return to the State from active duty are eligible, so long as the other requirements are met. Accordingly, the bill standardizes the terms used but does not expand eligibility for this exemption.

Other Changes: The bill alters several additional provisions that confer certain benefits and rights to members of the armed services or the military (sometimes also including PHS in current law). As noted above, "uniformed services" (or "service member") is generally

substituted for “armed services” and related terms, thereby definitively including PHS and NOAA. Specifically, the bill makes those substitutions within sections of the Maryland Vehicle Law related to:

- temporary renewals of identification cards;
- vehicle registration exemptions for nonresidents stationed in the State (or a surrounding jurisdiction, as specified);
- temporary parking placards;
- exemptions from driver’s licensing requirements;
- expiration and renewal periods for driver’s licenses; and
- emissions inspection exemptions.

As a result of the above changes, under the bill, these provisions of the Maryland Vehicle Law are more standardized in the application of various benefits and privileges.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: HB 475 (Delegate Allen) - Environment and Transportation.

Information Source(s): Governor’s Office of Small, Minority, and Women Business Affairs; Department of Commerce; Department of Budget and Management; Maryland Department of the Environment; Maryland Department of Health; Maryland Department of Labor; Department of Natural Resources; Maryland Department of Transportation; Department of Veterans and Military Families; Maryland Insurance Administration; Department of Legislative Services

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