

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 309 (Senator Simonaire)
 Education, Energy, and the Environment

Department of Veterans and Military Families - Online Registry

This bill requires the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program in the Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF), by December 31, 2025, to establish and maintain an online registry to provide information to registered individuals. The Secretary of Veterans and Military Families must include in their annual report specified information related to the online registry. The bill also alters several definitions relating to the military.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: DVMF general fund expenditures increase by \$100,000 in FY 2026 to establish the online registry and by \$10,000 annually thereafter to maintain the online registry. Revenues are not affected.

(in dollars)	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030
Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
GF Expenditure	100,000	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Net Effect	(\$100,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)	(\$10,000)

Note: () = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary/Current Law:

Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program – Generally

Under current law, the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program within DVMF ensures that veterans are informed of the services, benefits, and assistance available to them and that general issues relating to veterans' needs are brought to the attention of the Governor and the General Assembly. The program is administered and coordinated by a director, who is appointed by the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families.

The program must actively help veterans and their dependents become aware of and access any service or benefit to which they are entitled, including tax, health care, disability, and pension benefits. In collaboration with the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the program must actively help veterans and their dependents become aware of and access education and training benefits to which they are entitled. The director must support veterans and their dependents through the service or benefit process and refer veterans, veterans' dependents, and veterans' survivors to the appropriate governmental unit for claims assistance.

Online Registry: The bill establishes online registry and new requirements for the program. The registry must (1) allow an individual to register; (2) provide registered individuals information, including available services, benefits, and news that impacts veterans, service members, military families, and other interested individuals; (3) allow the registered individual to update their online registry information including the individual's name, email address, and optional statuses; and (4) have the capability to import shareable registration data provided by other authorized units of State government.

Under the bill, the program must require an individual registering with the online registry to provide the individual's name and email address and request that the individual provide the following *optional* status information: (1) whether the individual is a veteran; (2) whether the individual is currently on active duty; (3) whether the individual is a member of the uniformed services, a reserve component, or the Maryland Defense Force; and (4) if the individual is not a veteran or a specified member, whether the individual is a spouse of a member or veteran, a dependent child of a member or veteran, or any other interested individual.

Department of Veterans and Military Families – Annual Report

Current law requires the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families to submit an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly that includes:

- the number of (1) requests for help in obtaining benefits; (2) public contacts made by the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program; (3) veterans enrolled in the U.S. Veterans Health Administration; and (4) veterans receiving benefits;
- the average amount of disability and pension benefits received by qualified individuals in Maryland compared to those in other states;
- an account of the costs of operating the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program;
- a status update on several programs, including cemeteries, memorials, and veterans homes, among others;
- a general assessment of the status of Maryland veterans;
- the estimated impact current *military* operations may have on the needs of veterans in the future (the bill repeals the reference to “*military*”);
- the status of federal veterans programs as they relate to Maryland veterans; and
- any other issues concerning veterans at the Secretary’s discretion.

Under the bill, the annual report must also include a report on the online registry, including (1) the total number of individuals on the registry; (2) the number of individuals on the registry listed by statuses, including those with an undeclared status; (3) the number of individuals added to the registry in the previous year; and (4) the number of individuals that unsubscribed or were removed from the registry in the previous year.

State Government Article – Definitions

The bill adds definitions of several military terms to § 9-901 of the State Government Article as shown in **Exhibit 1** below.

State Fiscal Effect: DVMF advises that it does not currently have a service for allowing users to upload information to the department as required under the bill. As a result, DVMF advises that it must hire a contractor to develop the online registry. DVMF anticipates utilizing contractual services at an estimated cost of \$100,000 in fiscal 2026 only. DVMF anticipates additional costs in future years, estimated at \$10,000 annually beginning in fiscal 2027, to update and maintain the registry.

Therefore, DVMF general fund expenditures increase by \$100,000 in fiscal 2026 for contractual services to develop the online registry and by \$10,000 annually beginning in fiscal 2027 for ongoing contractual services to update and maintain the online registry.

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

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
Military family	n/a	Military family includes the spouse and dependent children of a service member or veteran related by blood, marriage, or adoption
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

Additional Comments: The bill takes effect October 1, 2025. DVMF must establish the online registry by December 31, 2025. This provides the department only three months to engage a contractor and develop the required registry.

Additional Information

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

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Information Technology; Department of Veterans and Military Families; Department of Legislative Services

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km/jc

Analysis by: Thomas S. Elder

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510