

HJ0004 - Commission to Establish a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial

Written Testimony of Dan C. Tootle in SUPPORT for the Bill

to the

Maryland House of Delegates Rules and Executive Nominations
Committee

Maryland House of Delegates, Room 150

2:00 pm February 24, 2020

Urging the Governor to create a certain commission with appropriate funding and authority for the purpose of establishing a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial that honors the service of women veterans of the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Women Veterans of the State of Maryland to urge this Committee to approve and further move the House of Delegates Bill HJ0004 through the legislative process of the 2020 Maryland General Assembly.

I particularly want to thank Delegate Heather Bagnall of District 33 for agreeing to originate this bill after receiving a request from myself to do so, and to Delegates Brian Crosby of District 29B, Mike Rogers of District 32, and Charles Wilson of District 28 for co-sponsoring this bill. When I contacted Delegate Bagnall to request that such a bill to create a commission that will lead to the funding and establishment of a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial, I was not certain that the request coming from a non-woman veteran would be seriously considered to become a matter of legislation within the current General Assembly session. But, pleasantly Delegate Bagnall understood the need for such a memorial no matter from whom the request had come and has proceeded accordingly. So, here we are today assessing the worth of this requested action on the part of our Governor.

As to why a memorial is appropriate and is needed to honor the women of this state who have put on the uniform and have served as a member of this nation's and our state's armed forces? Part of the answer has to do with just how many of our state's women have served in that manner. The Dept of the Veterans Administration tells us that our state has 399,936 veterans at this time; of which 58,000 are women who have served in the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, and Coast Guard. So, that is how many women veterans of our state currently are residents within Maryland.

But the major part of that answer is to publicly and properly acknowledge and honor the women of our state who have been willing to assume the risk of such service, and who have served in every area of armed forces assignment on our behalf.

And we have many more such women who will become veterans in the coming years. The Department of Defense tells us that 1,347,106 persons are currently serving on active

duty for the United States. Of that number, 733,753 are women who are wearing the uniform; many of whom are serving right here in Maryland and who will become part of our state's women veteran population in the near future.

What I have not been able to determine specifically is how many of our women veterans have served in the Maryland National Guard or Air Guard or have been reservists who have been called to active duty from their private civilian lives. But, given that our state counts 8,000 National Guard and Air Guard members at this time, a similar percentage to that of the VA's resident count indicates that there are approximately 1,400 women among that number who also will join their veteran counterparts when they retire or separate from active duty here in Maryland.

So, the number of the women veterans who reside in our cities and communities is significant in numbers and whom, like the other Maryland veterans play significant roles as leaders and productive citizens who are backbone members in every walk of life wherever they may live, in much the same manner as they acted while on active duty.

At the present time the state of Maryland Department of Veterans manages five veteran memorials. They are the War Memorial Building, the Maryland Korean War Memorial, and the Maryland Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Baltimore, and the Gold Star Families Monument, and the Maryland World War II Memorial in Annapolis. There is not a similarly managed memorial for Maryland's Women Veterans, but there is a memorial monument to honor women in military service that is located at the Chesapeake House Travel Plaza in Cecil County along the I-95 freeway.

This memorial was dedicated on Veterans Day of 2014 after having been designed through a collaboration of the public and several agencies; to include the "Commission on the Establishment of the Women in Military Service Monument" that was established by the 2005 General Assembly for that purpose. Senator Kathy Klausmeier was identified to me as having been the head of that Commission.

The existing monument was furnished as in "in-kind" donation by the architect and construction company that provided the remodeling of the Chesapeake House Travel Plaza. It consists of a granite monument that includes an inspirational quote, along with triangular bronze plaques. Access to the monument is through the Food Court of the Plaza.

What our women veterans of Maryland deserve is a significant memorial within Maryland that honors their service and reflects the honor shown by them for willingly placing themselves in danger on behalf of the citizens of Maryland and this nation. The women of Maryland have served as members of this nation's and state's armed forces in every conflict since beginning in the 19th century's World War I and have answered the call to such duty in every conflict of this nation through today's Middle East wars.

They have served honorably and with distinction. First, in non-combat duty positions, and now they serve their duties across every type of military service. Regardless of the duties

to which they have been assigned and have served, they have faced the same dangers as their male counterparts; their untimely deaths in combat and combat-related operations has clearly attested to the risks that they have taken and the honor and respect they so richly deserve.

When I served my 21-years of active duty as a Navy officer and aircraft carrier pilot, there were no women allowed to serve on naval combat vessels or to act as pilots or crewpersons of combat aircraft. The Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps operated within similar constraints for the women who served on active duty at that time. However, the restriction for women to serve in such duties has been shown to have been an artificial restraint through their subsequent service that has been performed since such restrictions were removed. But that historical restriction did nothing to disprove the depth and value of the invaluable service having been provided by women to meet our state's and nation's military needs no matter where assigned to serve.

I am a veteran who has been inspired to speak up and to ask that a Commission be created with appropriate funding and authority for the purpose of establishing an appropriate memorial that honors the service of the women veterans of Maryland who have served, those serving now, and for those who will serve in the future on behalf of those whom such service protects.