



February 22, 2021

The Honorable Chairman, Senator Guy Guzzone
Maryland Senate Budget & Taxation Committee
Miller Senate Office Building, 3 West
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Chairwoman, Delegate Shane Pendergrass
Maryland House Health & Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 241
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Members of the Maryland Senate Budget & Taxation Committee and Members of the Maryland House Health & Government Operations Committee:

I humbly write to ask that this committee favorably report on the following:

**MD 2021 SB 656/HB 874 Maryland Veterans Trust Fund
– CAM for Veterans Grant Program –
Established (David Perez Military Heroes Act (End 22 a Day))**

During the pandemic, the suicide rate has increased dramatically, and our veterans are particularly at-risk. According to a 2020 *Baltimore Sun* article, military suicides jumped 20% in 2020, compared to 2019. But even before the pandemic, 22 veterans per day were committing suicide, according to a U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs report in 2013. There is something we can do to better support our veterans, and this bill will allow our veterans more access to treatment.

I'm grateful to Senator Salling and Delegate Cox for filing this bill honoring all of our veterans, and specifically David Perez. David was a friend to each of us. He served in the US Army for 11 years and he was a combat vet. But upon his return to the States, David suffered severe PTSD. David approached his challenges with frankness, and to distract himself from his demons, he spent his time in the most honorable way imaginable – by volunteering tirelessly to support his fellow veterans and the community. David volunteered for several organizations, but I was privileged to work with him supporting a charity which supports mothers who have lost a child to violence. David proudly served as Press Secretary and astounded us with his boundless energy. He did this to honor his mother and his deceased brother. From personal loss to PTSD due to combat, David could have accessed the help he needed to confront and heal from his PTSD, had this bill been law.

We can all be proud of this bill's two main objectives:

- 1) To help our struggling Maryland veterans access assistance for alternative forms of treatment;
- 2) To honor Mr. Perez's military service, his tireless dedication to continue serving the community upon his return, and to acknowledge the demons he wrestled as a result of PTSD. This bill allows David to represent in death all our veterans who have similarly struggled and lost their battle, while providing a better way forward.

Thus, I implore you to favorably report on this bill and allow our veterans to access funds from the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund to provide grants for PTSD, anxiety, depression, stress, etc. so they can obtain various medical treatments. Our Maryland veterans deserve our gratitude and support for their selfless service and sacrifice.

Thank you,
Nicolee Ambrose