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

I write to this committee seeking a favorable report for:

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

My name is Evan Young, I was a friend of David's, and within moments of first meeting him, it was clear to me that he wanted his life to be one of serving and helping others – especially his fellow veterans. Every conversation, every late-night call, at some point referenced someone David was trying his best to help.

David Perez was a Marylander, Veteran, and patriot with a big heart. He served in the United States Army for 11 years. As a combat veteran, after he came home, he decided to dedicate his life to helping others dealing with the aftereffects of their time serving America. However, it did not end there. Whether the recipient of David's selflessness was a mother who had recently lost a son or daughter to violence, thankful for the Thanksgiving Dinner he charitably helped serve, a child who he helped provide Christmas presents for, giving them maybe their only gift that holiday, or a veteran suffering the crippling effects of substance abuse, depression, and hopelessness – David was there, ready to continue to serve his country, and his community.

Sadly, in the fall of 2020 David's own challenges from his time served caught up with him, and at just 34 years old David was taken from all who he loved, and loved him, with what should have been decades of David's life ahead of him. David's story is tragic, his absence will leave a void in the world, but his journey unfortunately is not unheard of. Maryland has the opportunity to help create a different story for those who will come after David.

In 2013, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs released a report that from 1999 to 2010, tragically, 22 veterans a day in the United States were dying by suicide. This is a heartbreaking and tragic statistic about the brave men and women who have served our country.

Our Combat veterans in Maryland are not immune to this. Many are struggling with stress, depression, and PTSD from their time serving and defending us as we sit safe and secure, here at home. A 2020 Baltimore Sun article reported that military suicides jumped by as much as 20% last year compared to the same period in 2019. The increase is even greater for suicides among active-duty soldiers. Those deaths were up 30% in 2020, rising from 88 last year to 114 this year.

This bill has 2 main objectives:

First, to honor the work Mr. Perez did, by keeping his memory, dedication, and passion alive through the lives that will be helped, and saved, as a result.

Second, to help our veterans in Maryland receive assistance for alternative forms of treatment as they seek physical and mental health and wellness and relief in the wake of their time serving America. Continuing to simply rely on the treatment the way we always have, the way we always have, will result in the more tragic stories like David's. If that were not true, we would not even have this issue to talk about today, because our current course action would be sufficient, and this plight of our veterans would exist. Complementary and Alternative treatment options will enrich and save lives, and every day without them, is a day knowing we are not doing everything we could be for these men and women.

Though David's death is final, if it is the catalyst to act to help improve and save the lives of countless veterans to come after him, I am confident David would say he did not die in vain – and those lives saved, were worth the struggle he had to endure.

That is why I respectfully ask for a favorable report for **SB 656 / HB 874 Maryland Veterans Trust Fund – CAM for Veterans Grant Program – Established (David Perez Military Heroes Act (End 22 a Day))**

Thank you,

Evan Young