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Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

The Honorable Chairman / Senator Guy Guzzone

3 West

Miller Senate Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee

The Honorable Chairwoman / Delegate Shane Pendergrass

Room 241

House Office Building

Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Hello Maryland Senate Budget and Taxation Committee and Maryland House Health and Government Operations Committee :

I write to ask theses committee's respectfully for a favorable report for:

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)

In 2013 the United States Department of Veterans Affairs released a report that from 1999 to 2010 that 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.

David Perez was a Marylander, Veteran, and patriot with a big heart he served in the United States Army for 11 years, he was a combat vet and after he served his country he decided to dedicate his life to helping other veterans who served with their challenges from time served in the Military, sadly in the fall of 2020 David's own challenges from his time served caught up with him and we tragically lost him way to soon.

What's sadder still is I watched him lose his fight in real time. I knew David, personally, and have worked with him in our efforts to champion veteran initiatives. Most all of us who are in this fight are doing so in some respects to fight our own demons. One of the main challenges is that there is no one solution that works for everyone. What's more, (as this bill looks to address) financial hardships often lead to veterans being able to see the treatment path that would help, but die while waiting for the means to attain it. I believe that we entered into a social contract with our warfighters to ensure that doesn't happen. This bill honors that contract.

Our combat veterans in Maryland and across the Country are struggling with stress, depression, and PTSD from their time served. A 2020 Baltimore Sun article reported that military suicides jumped by as much as 20% for 2020 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 as a result of Covid 19 restrictions in the US.

I write you today as 100% disabled veteran, President of Platoon 22, and a proud father who's kids wouldn't be here if my suicide attempt hadn't failed and I hadn't found help this bill will provide. I got lucky. I didn't have the money at the time but good people

helped me. Today all of you have the ability to be "good people" to our states veteran population.

This bill has 2 main objectives: 1. To honor the work of what Mr. Perez did, and to keep his memory, dedication, and passion for this issue alive. 2. To help our struggling veterans in our State receive assistance for alternative forms of treatment for their time serving our country. We hope that these forms of treatment make them feel better about themselves, and raise them up, not tear them down. Our veterans in Maryland have made the ultimate sacrifice and have fought for our freedoms. Let's do all that we can in Maryland to fight for them!

That is why I respectfully ask these 2 committees for a favorable report for **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)**

Thank You,

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