

Stephen Barrett
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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 these respectful 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)

My name is Stephen Barrett. My wife and I are small business owners and I am a trustee for a local nonprofit. I live in Frederick, and am a lifelong resident of Maryland.

I became friends with David Perez several years ago when we met at a political function. We immediately bonded, like so many of us with a history of trauma do. It is as if there is a certain aura around those of us with PTSD that draws us to one another.

David was a constant and continual advocate for veterans. He firmly believed in helping others, especially those who have served our country. When David became aware of any need in the community, he immediately jumped to see that the need was met.

Many times those needs were from a veteran requiring some form of assistance. Those needs were oftentimes simply for a listening ear. Other times, just for someone to sit beside them to allow them to feel safe enough to drift off into much needed rest and sleep. And still other times, those needs were for transportation - either for the veteran, for their belongings, or for food and medicine. During the pandemic, David organized and facilitated multiple food drives for veterans and people in recovery housing. Many times I was asked, and was able to assist him achieve these food drives as well as move furniture for veterans, with our trucks, vans, and trailers. I am grateful that I was able to help out and work with David on so many of these projects.

There were many times that I would spend hours on the phone with David so that he could just decompress himself from all the stress of helping others, or so that I could be a listening ear for him when tragedy struck and he lost another veteran to suicide or overdose. So many have turned to drugs and alcohol to self-medicate. Tragically, while under the influence of either, their homicidal and suicidal ideologies are acted upon because of the intoxication.

Over the past 38 years, I have personally used every single one of the proposed alternative treatments in this bill and have found them to be beneficial for relief of my PTSD symptoms on some level. I saw David and many others benefit from these proposed alternative treatments, and knowing we each all have bio individuality, their benefit furthered my belief in these alternative treatments.

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.

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 August of 2020, David's own challenges from his time served caught up with him, and we tragically lost him way too soon. We all are tired of hearing about stories like this and it is time to try to do more about this.

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% in 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.

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 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,

Stephen Barrett