

Testimony Submitted by: Gary Kessler
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Testimony on House Bill 98 before the Maryland General Assembly
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The Southern Maryland Navy Alliance (SMNA) appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 98. SMNA is a committed group of volunteers working to protect the current and future economy of Southern Maryland. In particular, we are dedicated to protecting the missions, identifying opportunities, and mitigating threats posed to Naval Air Station (NAS) Patuxent River. Our organization is comprised of retired or former senior Navy Leadership, business owners, contractors, community leaders and officials from St. Mary's County. Our organization has strong relationships with base leadership and foster close community relations with local government and its key departments, maintaining vital partnerships with state-level government on issues impacting the community and NAS Patuxent River.

SMNA is constantly working to help enhance the base's capabilities in achieving its vital national security mission to make our Navy and our Country stronger and safer. SMNA has worked with the community and the base leader to address a range of infrastructure challenges. These infrastructure needs were both inside the base as well as outside the gate. Case in point, last year SMNA helped provide assistance to St. Mary's County as they applied for a Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) grant from the Office of Local Defense and Community Cooperation (OLDCC) within the Department of Defense. This program provides communities with federal dollars to address infrastructure needs outside the gate but are projects that will enhance the military value of the installation. St. Mary's County was awarded \$395,118 to improve pedestrian access across Route 235 to installation gates, supporting Naval Air Station Patuxent River. To date, St. Mary's County is the only entity in Maryland to have been awarded a DCIP grant. However, the program requires a local match. Passage of the military bond bill legislation would provide the State and Local communities with a very tangible tool to go after additional DCIP grants to address infrastructure outside the gate. While St. Mary's County was able to support this project local communities, especially rural one's have limits to matching federal grants so a state wide tool would be useful.

SMNA has also been very active in advocating for efforts to protect against encroachment around NAS Patuxent River as well as around the Atlantic Test Range which is critical for Naval Aviation. The Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative (REPI) has been successfully employed by the Department of

Defense to protect encroach at NAS Patuxent River and around the regional ranges. In fact, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks toured these areas last spring heralding them as a successful partnership that encouraged conservation while protecting bases missions. Enactment of a military bond bill in Maryland could be a tool that helps to encourage further partnerships like we have in southern Maryland. Again, REPI as well as a host of other innovative authorities in the DoD require some type of match and some communities just do not have the resources to make an attempt.

While we have been successful in a number of efforts without a military bond bill, there are plenty of additional needs that our community, and many other communities across this state, has that could be executed if a military bond bill were to exist. One challenge that we constantly face at NAS Patuxent River is traffic challenges around the installation. NAS Patuxent River has identified, for years, the need to upgrade several of the gates to enter the installation. However, getting those projects funded does not prioritize well within the DoD system of prioritizing military construction projects. As a result our traffic issues continue to build with no clear solution in sight. Other states like Massachusetts and Alabama have used state money, in the case of Massachusetts their bond bill, to fund gate improvements. It may seem counter intuitive but in the competitive world of maintaining and gaining new missions these bold actions from states are looked favorably by DoD and help local communities address traffic congestion issues. Here again, a military bond bill would be a great tool to make investments in our local communities and help solidify the military mission.

Like many other locations across the state and country, southern Maryland has its challenges in recruiting and retaining the talent needed for missions on military installations. We also face challenges in addressing workforce development needs for companies that do work on the base as well as for the government workforce. House bill 98 could also be a tool that is used to address those types of challenges in our local communities.

House Bill 98 is modeled off similar legislation in Massachusetts and would be an extremely helpful tool to ensuring that Maryland remains competitive to protect our current missions and look to grow in the future. We cannot be complacent because of our proximity to the nation's capital. Other states and local communities across this country are aggressive in fighting for new missions and protecting the one's they currently have. We need tools, like the one proposed in House bill 98, to stay aggressive and protect these assets for the state. As our adversaries continue to improve, the United States must prioritize innovation and investment in our military installations. Innovation, initiative, and

development are essential aspects of what needs to be done toward investment in Maryland's military installations.

Once again, thank you for the chance to testify for House Bill 98, and SMNA looks forward to future cooperation in supporting Maryland's military installations.