



Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Office of the Secretary

LARRY HOGAN
GOVERNOR

BOYD K. RUTHERFORD
LT. GOVERNOR

GEORGE W. OWINGS III
SECRETARY

March 8, 2022

The Honorable Paul G. Pinsky
Members of the Committee
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: SB 654 Veterans Affairs – Office of Communications and Public Affairs – Veterans
Advocacy and Education Act

Dear Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present a letter of support today in reference to Senate Bill 654 (SB654). This bill clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the Outreach and Advocacy Program in the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs. SB654 renames the Program in a manner that makes its purpose clear.

The Outreach and Advocacy Program was established in 2006 to inform veterans of the services, benefits, and assistance available to them by the state and federal government. Over the course of the last 15 years, the Program's communications role and program management responsibilities have increasingly expanded. This bill does three things: (1) as they exist in 2022, it crystallizes the roles and responsibilities of the Program, (2) related to the purpose of the Program it ensures transparency across federal, state, and local government as well as private sector, and (3) it establishes a foundation for future state leaders to clearly understand the breadth of responsibility assigned to the Program.

The amendment to SB654 only addresses the title of the bill and change to program name. In lieu of changing the title from a program to an office, the amendment clarifies in the title that we continue to provide outreach and advocacy but recognizes the transformation of the program and its evolving communications role. The amendment also ensures continuity of operations and consistency across MDVA programs. Every other arm of the Department is a 'program'. Therefore, the role of communications, outreach, and advocacy, should also be a program. Outreach and advocacy has been a cornerstone of this program. If the program title changes to the office of communications and public affairs our constituents will wonder if outreach and advocacy on behalf of veterans has ended, which it has not.

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This is a commonsense bill with no fiscal impact. The bill explains how the program has evolved since 2006, it describes the added responsibilities placed on the program, and clarifies to all whom we serve, exactly what we do. I respectfully ask that this committee provide a favorable vote, with the amendment, to SB654.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Owings III". The signature is stylized with large loops and a vertical line through the middle. The initials "III" are written at the end of the signature.

George W. Owings III
Secretary