

H.B. 250 – 2.9.23 – Environment and Transportation

TESTIMONY

Thank you, Chair Barve, Vice Chair Stein, and Members of the Committee. It's great to be presenting here today!

I'm requesting a favorable report on H.B. 250, the *Vehicle Laws – Disabled Veteran Registration Plates – Issuance*.

Currently in Maryland, disabled veterans can qualify for and receive a disabled veteran's license plate if the veteran has a total (100%) disability rating as a result of their military service. Upon qualification, they will receive a license plate with the words "Disabled Veteran" printed on it, and the registration for the plate will be waived.

The license plate, when affixed to a vehicle, provides a safety cue not only for the disabled veteran operating the vehicle but also for outside personnel who may need to approach the vehicle in any one given situation.

Because of the important safety role this license plate designation serves in helping a disabled veteran navigate civilian life, it is my intent with H.B. 250 to lower the qualifying threshold from 100% disabled to 50% disabled so more disabled veterans can apply and qualify.

Lowering the threshold to 50%, and not another specific percentage point, is intentional and important. Let me explain.

Whether their disabilities range from physical impairments to internal struggles and challenges related to the unseen like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a disabled veteran can suffer from any number of military service-related injuries. Having the designated plate affixed to their vehicle will help the disabled veteran and community operate in a safer and more understanding environment.

For example, the mid-level threshold for PTSD within a veteran is 50%, meaning at this level veterans can experience pronounced problems at work and in everyday life. These problems can range from significant reduction in productivity to a risk of **frequent panic attacks and difficulty following simple instructions**. If the veteran has a 30% PTSD rating combined with physical disabilities to reach 50%, this combination could potentially be severe enough that if **outside personnel, such as a first responder, was to approach the vehicle**, this action could trigger a PTSD episode within the disabled veteran and create an unsafe situation for all concerned parties.

However, if the vehicle displayed a “Disabled Veteran” license plate, the first responder (or other personnel) would see this cue and quickly determine the best method for connecting with the disabled veteran, one that does not pose a threat and decreases the chances of an episode. This in turn would create a safer environment for the disabled veteran and the community at large.

As of this past January, around 17,000 disabled veterans in Maryland had an active “Disabled Veteran” license plate. These would be veterans currently at the 100% disabled threshold.

However, if the threshold was lowered to 50% disabled as written in H.B. 250, roughly an additional 41,000 disabled veterans within Maryland would be eligible to apply. They would still be required to complete the qualifying steps but at least they would now have the opportunity to consider this option.

One point I do want to clarify is that lowering the qualifying threshold from 100% to 50% will not result in an increase cost for administrating departments and agencies as H.B. 250 keeps the free registration at the 100% disabled threshold. The shift in range only provides the opportunity for more disabled veterans to apply for

the unique license plate. Those between the 50%-99% range will still be required to pay the current fees already administered.

In closing, I would like to note that Governor Moore has clearly prioritized supporting veterans and, as a veteran myself, so have I. That is why I am asking you today to provide a favorable report for H.B. 250 as it will go a long way in providing a small but important recognition for our disabled veteran community.

I would also like to note that I have submitted for the record the unanimous letter of support from the Maryland General Assembly Veterans Caucus in favor of H.B. 250. I am thankful, humbled, and honored to have their support on such an important piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time, and I request a favorable report on H.B. 250.



MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VETERANS CAUCUS

TO: Chair Delegate Kumar P. Barve
Environment and Transportation Committee

FROM: Maryland Veterans Caucus, House Membership

DATE: January 31, 2023

RE: **HB0250 – Vehicle Laws – Disabled Veteran Registration Plates – Issuance**

The Maryland Veterans Caucus, House Membership respectfully requests a favorable report on **HB0250 – Vehicle Laws – Disabled Veteran Registration Plates – Issuance**

This bill was sponsored by **Delegate Mike Griffith** for the purpose of authorizing the Motor Vehicle Administration to issue disabled veteran registration plates to certain disabled veterans.

The Veterans Caucus mission it to study, develop, and promote legislation designed to improve the quality of life for veterans in the State of Maryland in the areas of employment, education, economics, training, and health. And to assist the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs in achieving its mission and goals, on behalf of the veterans in the State.

The Veterans Caucus Legislative Review Board offers and recommends support and a favorable report of HB 0250.

Thank you,

Mike Rogers

Delegate Mike Rogers
Acting Chair, Veterans Caucus

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

To study, develop, and promote legislation designed to improve the quality of life for veterans in the State of Maryland in the areas of benefits, employment, education, economics, training, and health, and to assist the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs in achieving its mission and goals, on behalf of all veterans in the State.