

In **Support** of **HB 273**, “Defend the Guard,”

Christopher Henrikson
1809 SW Wright Place
Troutdale, OR 97060

My name is Christopher Henrikson and I'm a former U.S. Army soldier who deployed twice to Iraq from 2004 - 2008. I'm writing here today to share my support for a bill being considered by the Maryland legislature, HB 273, The Maryland Defend Our Guard Act. There are many reasons why this bill allowing the state of Maryland to better control when and where their National Guard forces are deployed; however, my reasons will focus on psychological damage done to Maryland NG members and the larger crisis caused by high rates of PTSD and moral injury, to include a huge increase in veteran suicides, and the increased militarization of American police through the recruitment of U.S. combat veterans, the purchasing of excess military equipment to be used by police departments, and the overall militarization of police driven by twenty years of war.

Known statistics demonstrate that approximately thirty thousand active duty personnel and / or veterans have died by suicide since 9/11, a striking statistic not only for its large size, but because one, comparatively, only seven thousand service members were killed during deployments for the Global War on Terror, and two, historically, suicide rates for service members and veterans were lower than rates among the general population. A host of factors play a role here, to include both general aspects of military deployments such as “high exposure to trauma, stress, military culture and training, continued access to guns, and the difficulty of reintegrating into civilian life” and aspects specific to the post 9/11 era of combat, which include “a huge increase in exposure to improvised explosive devices (IEDs), an attendant rise in traumatic brain injuries (TBIs), and modern medical advances that have allowed service members to survive these and other physical traumas and return to the frontlines in multiple deployments. The combination of multiple traumatic exposures, chronic pain, and lasting physical wounds is linked to suicidal behaviors.”

Lastly, I'd like to mention the huge increase in police militarization driven by U.S. participation in the Global War on Terror Era. Police militarization in the U.S. is “as old as U.S. policing itself, yet it has exploded since September 11, 2001 and its intensification must be counted among the costs of this country's post-9/11 wars.” Alongside significant added costs to local governments and the state government of Maryland to train and maintain SWAT teams or other militarized units has been “the costs of intensified militarization for Black, Brown, Indigenous, and poor communities.” SWAT teams, empowered to act against advanced deadly threats to include terrorism, instead are used against drug offenders and other non-violent offenders as terrorism within the U.S. is increasingly unlikely. Combat vehicles, including mine resistant ambush vehicles, are purchased for use against protestors and other typical police missions, despite their advanced armor and capabilities. Combat veterans hired as police officers are statistically much more likely to use deadly force than non-combat veteran hires.

Thank you for your time,

Christopher Henrikson