

HB 250 - Del. Griffith - Testimony.pdf

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Testimony in Support of H.B. 250
Vehicle Laws – Disabled Veteran Registration Plates – Issuance

Dear Members of the Committee:

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

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" (DV) 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 and interact with the vehicle in any one given situation.

Because of the important safety role this license plate designation serves in helping a disabled veteran safely navigate civilian life, H.B. 250 lowers the qualifying threshold from 100% disabled to 50% disabled.

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

Let me explain.

The mid-level threshold for post-traumatic stress disorder (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.

Furthermore, if the veteran has a 30% PTSD rating but it's been combined with other physical disabilities to reach the 50% threshold, 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 the DV designation on the 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. There is no doubt this 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 DV license plate. These would be veterans currently at the 100% disabled threshold.

If the threshold was lowered to 50% disabled, roughly an additional 41,000 disabled veterans within Maryland would be eligible to apply for the designation. They would still be required to complete the qualifying steps but at least they would have the opportunity to consider the option. With this all being said, there are two points I want to clarify:

1. Lowering the qualifying threshold from 100% to 50% will not result in an increase cost for administrating departments and agencies.

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; and

2. Lowering the qualifying threshold from 100% to 50% will not result in qualifying applicants receiving *in addition* to the DV designation the universal disability symbol of a wheelchair.

H.B. 250 simply lowers the threshold to 50% for qualified veterans with service-related injuries to receive the DV designation on their license plate, not the DV designation and the wheelchair symbol. If they wish to also obtain the wheelchair symbol, they may apply as is currently required.

I would also like to note that the Maryland General Assembly Veterans Caucus unanimously supports H.B. 250, as you can see from the letter before you today. I'm thankful, humbled, and honored to have their support on such an important piece of legislation.

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 and keep our communities safe.

Thank you.