

DAVID FRASER-HIDALGO
Legislative District 15
Montgomery County

Economic Matters Committee
Chair
Property and Casualty Insurance
Subcommittee



The Maryland House of Delegates
6 Bladen Street, Room 223
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3186 · 301-858-3186
800-492-7122 Ext. 3186
David.Fraser.Hidalgo@house.state.md.us

THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Delegate Luke Clippinger
Chairman, House Judiciary Committee
House Office Building – Room 101
Annapolis, Md 21401

Mr. Chairman,

There is an ongoing shortage of police officers in our communities, and a shrinking number of qualified candidates interested in becoming a Maryland police officer. Between 2020 and 2021 there was an eighteen percent increase in the resignation rate of Maryland police officers and a forty-five percent increase in the retirement rate.¹ This past summer, Baltimore Police hired 56 officers but lost 156 sworn personnel. The President of the Fraternal Order of Police said then that the city does not have the luxury of waiting eighteen to twenty-four months for new officers to be available.² Qualified candidates are lacking due to attrition of older officers, competition from military and private security contractors, and an improving economy.

The Freedom to Serve Act HB433 will significantly increase the potential candidates of eligible law enforcement applicants to include military veterans who were honorably discharged but not yet U.S. citizens. These veterans served their country abroad, and now they are looking to serve their community at home. Through an amendment suggested by the Maryland Military Coalition, this legislation allows current members and honorably discharged veterans of the National Guard and Reserve Components who are LPRs to apply as candidates as well.

Many states have enacted legislation to address the ongoing public safety hiring crisis. In 2015 the Tennessee State Legislature unanimously passed a law allowing lawful permanent residents

¹ Police Executive Research Forum, *PERF Special Report*. (Jun. 11, 2021), <https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021>

² Alexa Ashwell, Baltimore 'does not have the luxury of waiting' for new officers, say FOP. FOX 45 NEWS (Aug. 22, 2022), [Baltimore 'does not have the luxury of waiting' for new officers, says FOP | WBFF \(foxbaltimore.com\)](https://www.fox45.com/news/baltimore-does-not-have-the-luxury-of-waiting-for-new-officers-say-fop/)

(LPRs) who were honorably discharged veterans to apply to serve as police officers. Colorado, Vermont, and West Virginia have no citizenship requirement for police officers, and seven other states only require legal permanent resident status or work authorization.³

HB433 provides an avenue for Lawful Permanent Residents who are honorably discharged veterans to become certified as law enforcement officers in Maryland. Obtaining citizenship is a lengthy, complex, and expensive process. Currently an LPR may work anywhere in the US and is eligible to serve in the armed forces. While military naturalization has historically been an expedited road to citizenship for LPRs, longer waits for security clearances and background checks have caused a decline in applications. Allowing veterans to serve our communities will help police departments combat critical staffing shortages while also enhancing law enforcement's relationships with neighborhood residents.

HB433 will make Maryland a safer and better place to live. A diverse police force that reflects the communities they serve is vital to building trust. By permitting honorably discharged LPRs to serve as police officers Maryland will build a diverse, bilingual police force thereby building trust and stronger relationships in the community. Legal permanent residents that have served in our military should be eligible to serve as police officers in their communities after their honorable discharge.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

³ Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force, [Backgrounder: Jurisdictions Permitting LPR Hiring](#). Focus Point, LEIFT (Aug. 17, 2021), [Backgrounder: Jurisdictions Permitting LPR Hiring - Law Enforcement Immigration Task Force \(leitf.org\)](#)