

Word Count: 349

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Tricare Premium Program Reimbursement

For Brigadier General Andrew Collins

Good afternoon Chairman Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and members of the House Appropriations Committee, my name is Brigadier General Andrew Collins, Deputy Adjutant General, and I am here today to speak on behalf of the dedicated men and women of the Maryland National Guard and advocate for SB 697, the cap removal of the Health Care for Heroes TRICARE premium reimbursement program, which also received a favorable unanimous vote from the Senate.

As a member of the National Guard, I can attest to the sacrifices that my fellow Citizen Soldiers and Airmen make to ensure the safety and well-being of our great state and nation. Providing our Guard members and their families with affordable health care ensures readiness when we are called to serve.

With the cap removed, service members like Staff Sgt. James Whiting, a firefighter with the Maryland Air National Guard, said he would use the extra money from his reimbursed premiums to help fund his retirement savings. For other Guard members, the extra money could go toward daycare, gas for commuting to work, groceries, or college tuition for themselves or their kids.

I know firsthand the challenges of balancing military service and civilian life. The demands of the Guard often require service members to take time away from work and their families to serve their country. It is only fitting that we provide them with the support they need, including affordable health care.

Governor Moore proclaimed 2024 as Maryland's "Year of the Military Family." Providing health care for them is an important tool for recruiting and retention of Maryland's citizen soldiers and airmen.

Please consider this critical readiness issue for Guard members to always be there when the state and nation needs them. Our citizen Soldiers and Airmen are worth the investment and I know it will make us a better state now and into the future as we can retain their incredible talent and dedication.

In conclusion, I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on SB 697, the Health Care for Heroes Tricare Premium Reimbursement Program.

Thank you for your time and consideration.