

SB 368 State Retirement and Pension System-Military Service Credit-Eligibility  
Written Testimony

Good afternoon. My name is Glenda Grogan and I am testifying today as a former Lt Commander of the Commissioned Corps of the United States Public Health Service (PHS). Early in my career, I was honored and eager to move to Maryland to accept a position as an occupational therapist at the National Institutes of Health with the Commissioned Corps. During my term of duty, I conducted research, gathered data, treated patients, wrote articles, and gave presentations on various diseases that affect the health of the American people. I served during the Gulf War and early on in the AIDS epidemic. Like members of the military, Commissioned Corps officers wear a uniform, carry a military ID, and receive the same benefits as active duty military.

Although they are not required to move every few years, PHS Commissioned Corps (PHSCC) officers are subject at any time to deployment to all parts of the nation and the world to address public health crises due to natural disasters, acts of violence, and war. They have responded to such crises as 9/11, the anthrax attacks, the school shootings at Sandy Hook and overcrowding and immigrant health issues at the border. Commissioned Corps officers are often the first to be deployed to danger zones around the world, treating people with communicable diseases and addressing complex health issues. They have served alongside the military health service in countries such as Afghanistan and with civilian medical personnel in disaster areas such as those affected by Hurricane Katrina. A team of PHSCC officers was awarded with a Presidential Unit Citation from President Obama for leading the global response to the Ebola epidemic. From day one through the present, they have been involved in addressing the COVID 19 pandemic. I am proud to have been a member of the Commissioned Corps.

When I first started my current position as an occupational therapist with Montgomery County Public Schools, I noticed that there was a military service benefit available to Maryland educators who had worked in the school system for 10 years or more and who had served in the military. The Public Health Service was identified as an eligible service. However, when I applied for this credit, my application was denied because my service with the Commissioned Corps did not occur within three specific time frames. These time frames correlate with World War II, The Korean War, and The

Vietnam War. I was stunned and extremely disappointed by this stipulation. By requiring service dates—all of which occurred before 1976—the State of Maryland was essentially excluding the PHS from receiving this benefit. When I questioned this, I was told that my only option was to contact my state senator to get this pension law changed.

So that's what I did. I'm extremely grateful to Senator Waldstreicher for drafting a bill to change the wording of the pension code to remove the specified dates and to make service in the Commissioned Corps at any time eligible for the military service benefit. Members of the Commissioned Corps may not carry arms on the battlefield, but every day they serve on the frontlines often in danger zones, treating people affected by natural disasters, attacks of violence, and communicable diseases.

When you take the oath to serve in the Commissioned Corps, you don't know what public health crisis you may face or where you may be deployed, but you know that this is part of your duty of service. I believe this is true service, fully deserving of receiving this valuable and meaningful military service benefit. It would mean a great deal to me personally but it would also affect all current and future Maryland educators who have served in the Commissioned Corps. I urge you to support this bill and to include service in the Commissioned Corps at any time as eligible for receiving this benefit.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of this bill. I especially want to thank Senator Waldstreicher for drafting this legislation, Senator Gile for co-sponsoring the bill, and Senator Waldstreicher's Chief of Staff Kara Dudley for all of her support in addressing this issue.

Glenda Grogan, MS, OTR/L  
MCPS Occupational Therapist