



Montgomery County Chapter
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February 18, 2024

The Honorable C. T. Wilson
Chair, Economic Matters Committee
Box 231
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Subject: An **Important Point** Regarding HB 0604, Families Serve Act

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Economic Matters Committee

The Montgomery County Chapter affiliate of the national Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) now has, among its members, active duty and retired officers from every uniformed service save the new Space Force. As a result, the membership is sensitive to its duty to advocate for the equal treatment of the uniformed services community in legislative matters that involve all those who wear or have worn our Nation's various uniforms. This duty also extends to the families of these veterans.

In large part, the chapter supports the intent of HB0604, as it certainly addresses a widely recognized need, and it demonstrates the Governor's expressed pledge to show 2024 to be the Year of the Military Family. While we applaud the Executive's intent with this legislation, we wish to point out that it has a troublesome flaw in its provisions that the General Assembly can easily correct. This involves the troublesome confusion over the expressions "armed services" and "uniformed services," when considering "veterans" benefits, such as is the subject of HB0604.

As written, this legislation seems to exclude the spouses of both the NOAA Corps officers and Public Health Service officers. We respectfully direct the Committee's attention to how the state defines "veteran" in law and has since 1984. The language in the Maryland Code, at **Maryland General Provisions Code Ann. § 1-117**, clearly states that:

"With respect to any State program of benefits, rights, or privileges applicable to a veteran under this Code, "veteran" includes, if the individual is eligible under 39 U.S.C. § 101, a member of the commissioned corps of (1) the Public Health Service; or (2) the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey."

It is our contention that the legislative language presently in HB0604 needs to be harmonized with the § 1-117 provisions, such that it will be clear that the spouses of NOAA Corps and Public Health Service officers are eligible to take advantage of this benefit and will not be left behind.

It is our understanding that the Maryland Military Coalition will have testimony on this aspect of HB0604. The Montgomery County Chapter supports the advocacy by the Coalition and joins it in requesting a **FAVORABLE report with Amendment**. We believe that factoring in § 1-117 will clear up any and all confusion on exactly who is covered by this legislation. The Governor is addressing a practical workforce development need here, which we applaud.

The Montgomery County Chapter thanks you for your attention to our concern.

With respect,



Captain David H. Peterson, NOAA (Ret)
Secretary
Montgomery County Chapter
MOAA