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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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January 18, 2024

Senator Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Senate Committee on Education, Energy & The Environment
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West Wing
11 Bladen St., Annapolis, MD 21401 - 1991

Remarks of
Christopher R. Arnold
Northeast Region Liaison
United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office

Support of: SB 88 – AN ACT concerning Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families.

Testimony

Chairman and honorable committee members, the Department of Defense is grateful for the opportunity to support the policies reflected in Senate Bill 88, for the purpose of establishing the Maryland Commission of Veterans and Military Families, to study developing and implementing a strategic plan to make Maryland the best state for military families. By including the military community's perspective in state planning documents and adding military community representation to state boards and councils, states help ensure that unique operational requirements and military family priorities are considered across pertinent policy areas.

My name is Christopher Arnold. I am the Mid-Atlantic Region Liaison at the United States Department of Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

We represent the Department and establish relationships with state leaders across the country who are concerned for troops and their families' welfare by harmonizing state and federal law and regulation on policy problems of national significance. These are identified by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, and the National Guard Bureau as areas where states can play a crucial role.

Across the nation, we have seen states recognize the value of having military voices at the table, including military families.¹ This inclusion strengthens mission readiness, addresses family concerns, and fosters deeper collaboration between communities and state leaders.² The policies in Maryland Senate Bill 88 take this vital step by establishing the Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families, offering a platform for diverse voices within the military

¹ <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/StatePolicy/pdfs/2024/bestpractices-militarycommunityrepresentationonstateboardsandcouncils.pdf>

² On December 13, 2023, the Adjutant General of the Maryland National Guard, Major General Janeen L. Birkhead said "Strong military families will contribute directly to our national security. Maryland is committed to being a national leader in addressing the needs of military families."

community to actively contribute toward shaping a statewide strategic plan which prioritizes the well-being of veterans and military families.

With nearly 77,000 service members and their families in Maryland, including the viewpoint of military families on this commission helps ensure unique operational requirements and military family priorities are considered.³ Senate Bill 88 helps achieve the ambitious goal to make 2024 the ‘Year for Military Families’ in the Old Line State.⁴

Military community representation on state boards and councils can have a profound impact on creating livable communities, enhancing military mission readiness, and influencing the quality-of-life factors that are critical in strategic basing decisions.⁵ The policies proposed in Senate Bill 88 include appointing representatives of military family advocacy organizations, who would bring a wealth of experience and diverse perspectives that can lead to more innovative solutions to community challenges. Understanding the specific needs of military families, such as accessible healthcare, quality education, and employment opportunities for spouses, military community representatives can advocate for improvements in these areas.⁶

When military families are supported in their communities through improved education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, it reduces stress and distractions for service members, allowing them to focus more effectively on their mission.⁷ Livable communities with robust support systems for military families can be a key factor in the decision of service members to continue their military career.⁸ Additionally, such communities are attractive to potential recruits who consider the quality of life for their families when deciding to join the military.

The quality of life in surrounding communities is also a critical factor in basing decisions.⁹ Bases located in areas with strong support for military families, good schools, and accessible child care and healthcare are more desirable and can influence the Military Departments’ strategic basing decisions.¹⁰ Bases benefit from being in communities that understand and are responsive to the

³ Defense Manpower Data Center, December 31, 2022.

⁴ <https://governor.maryland.gov/news/press/pages/governor-moore-announces-first-items-in-2024-legislative-agenda-to-support-and-empower-maryland-military-families.aspx>

⁵ See *supra* at 1.

⁶ <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/priorities/military-community-representation-on-state-boards-and-councils>

⁷ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. "Strengthening the military family readiness system for a changing American society." (2019). <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/read/25380/chapter/4>

⁸ On July 20, 2023, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks said “When we take care of our people—our service members and their families—they can focus on their mission to defend the nation. Taking care of our people’s basic needs and improving the quality of life of our service members have a direct impact on military readiness.”

⁹ The Secretaries of the Military Departments have made the importance of military spouse licensure explicitly clear as they consider the availability of license reciprocity when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives. This consideration was codified by Congress as a requirement in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. Notably, 10 U.S.C. § 1781(b) note requires the military services to produce annual basing decision scorecards at the state and installation level considering military family readiness issues and quality-of-life factors including, but not limited to, the availability of license reciprocity, housing, healthcare, and other factors which the Military Department Secretaries shall designate.

¹⁰ <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/1449706/service-secretaries-say-quality-of-schools-reciprocity-of-licenses-should-be-co/>

unique needs of military families. The result is a mutually beneficial relationship between military installations and their surrounding communities, enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

While the military has its internal support structures, these often focus on the immediate and internal aspects of military life. State boards and commissions such as the proposed Maryland Commission of Veterans and Military Families, on the other hand, address broader issues that intersect with civilian sectors, such as education, healthcare, and employment. The role of the Maryland Commission is to bridge the gap between military and civilian spheres, ensuring that the needs of military families are understood and met in the wider community context.

Such bodies often lead to long-term cost savings and efficiency improvements, providing a focused platform for addressing specific needs of the military community, which can streamline services and prevent the misallocation of resources, complementing existing structures by filling gaps in services and offering specialized insights that might otherwise be overlooked.¹¹ The inclusion of the military community onto the Commission is a strategic decision to leverage their unique skills, perspectives, and experiences.

In closing, let me say that we are grateful for the tremendous effort that the Maryland has historically given in supporting our Service members and their families. On behalf of the Department of Defense, we appreciate your consideration of the policy changes expressed in Senate Bill 88 and thank Senator Gile for her sponsorship and leadership.

Yours etc.,

CHRISTOPHER R. ARNOLD
Mid-Atlantic Region Liaison
Defense-State Liaison Office

¹¹ <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/priorities/facilitate-military-representation-on-certain-state-boards-and-councils/2017>

SB 0088 Maryland Written Testimony Favorable.pdf

Uploaded by: Jayson Spiegel

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

January 18, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan, Vice Chair
Maryland Senate
Miller Senate Office Building, 2 West
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report** – SB 0088 – Maryland Commission on Veterans and Families

Dear Chair Feldman and distinguished members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC) and as its President, I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report** by the Committee on ***SB 0088, Maryland Commission on Veterans and Families***, sponsored by Senator Dawn Gile. This bill will establish a Commission on Veterans and Military Families which will develop a strategic plan to make Maryland the best state for veterans and military families.

Although many notable legislative and administrative proposals have been identified to improve the lives of Maryland veterans and military families, these ideas are considered in isolation without a comprehensive analysis. The Commission will be able to develop a statewide strategic plan to guide legislative and budgetary decisions. Maryland is in competition with other states for military retirees. Other states – including Virginia – have established similar commissions to advise the legislature and Governor on actions that can improve the lives of veterans and military families.

The strategic plan to be developed by the Commission will guide legislative and budget decisions. The Commission will identify key performance indicators and quantifiable metrics to assess the effectiveness of initiatives and determine whether what other states are doing should be adopted in Maryland.

We are impressed by and fully endorse the diversity of voices and representation required in the Commission's membership by SB 0088. We are also gratified to see the inclusion of a

representative of the Federal Reserve, a significant part of the military that all too often lacks a seat at the table.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports SB 0088** and asks for a ***FAVORABLE*** report from the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. Establishing this Commission directly supports and enhances the Moore Administration's Year of the Military Families.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a non-partisan organization of 21 Veteran organizations representing over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families -- almost half of the 355,000 veterans in the State.

We want to thank Senator Gile for sponsoring this legislation and her strong support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Spiegel', written in a cursive style.

Jayson Spiegel
LTC USAR (Ret)
President

Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition

James P. Monahan
Air Force Sergeants Association

John P. May
American Military Society

Elwood R. Raphael Gray
American Minority Veterans Research Project

W. W. W.
Association of the United States Navy

Lynn A. Gask
Commissioned Officers Association of the
US Public Health Service

Wilbur B. Fisher
Disabled American Veterans

Seldon H. Freedy
Distinguished Flying Cross Association

Phyllis J. Collins
Fleet Reserve Association

Seldon H. Freedy
Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Steve L. Brooker
Maryland Air National Guard Retirees'
Association

Emmett R. Robert
Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Robert J. Winton
Military Officers Association of America

Charles E. Spahr
Military Order of the Purple Heart

E. J.
Montford Point Marines of America

M. L. Meese
National Association for Black Veterans

Michael P. Hays
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

Christian Andreasen
NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

John S.
Reserve Organization of America

Catherine L. McGraw
Society of Military Widows

E. J.
National Active and Retired Federal Employees
Veterans Affairs Directorate, NARFE MD

M. Blackwell
Veterans of Foreign Wars

SB88_FAV_AARP.pdf

Uploaded by: Karen Kalla

Position: FAV



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SB 88 Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families
FAVORABLE
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
Thursday, January 18, 2024

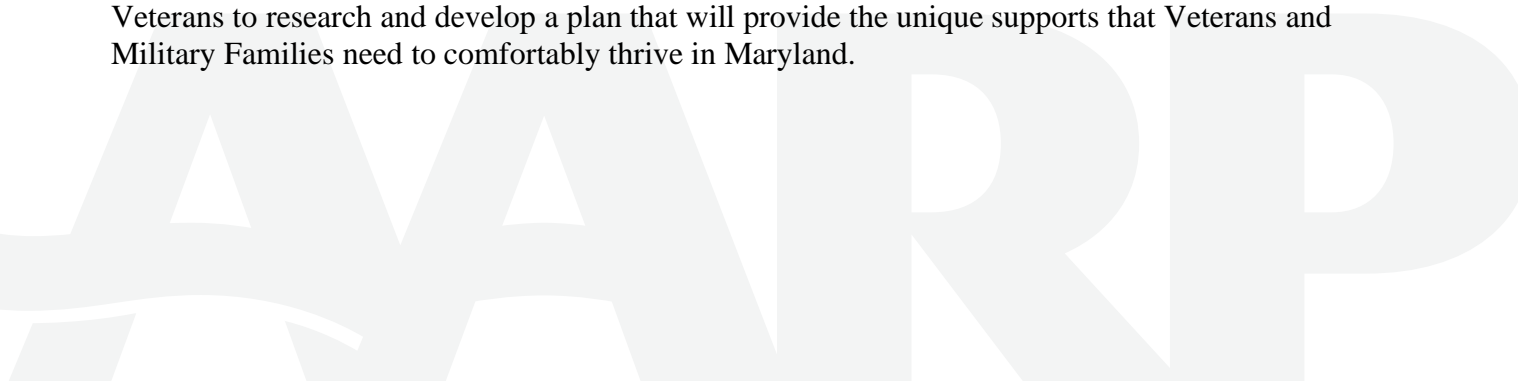
Good afternoon, Chairman Feldman and members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee. My name is Karen Kalla, volunteer AARP legislative aide, member of the AARP Executive Council, and resident of Montgomery County. AARP MD and its more than 850,000 members support SB 88 Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families. We thank Senators Gile, Beidle, Carozza, Klausmeier, Simonaire, and Smith for sponsoring this important legislation.

SB 88 would establish the Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families, comprised of veterans, legislators, policy makers, and others dedicated to enhancing the lives of veterans, to develop a plan to make Maryland a supportive and welcoming place for Veterans and their families.

AARP has nearly 6 million members who have served or are currently serving in the U.S. military, making AARP the largest Veteran's support organization in the market space. Approximately one quarter of all veterans in the U.S. are members of AARP.

AARP is dedicated to empowering Veterans, Military, and their Families (VMF) to navigate the complexities of life's transitions by addressing the unique needs and expectations of this audience. More specifically, we are focusing on 1) caregiving - to prepare family caregivers to meet the unique needs of Veterans, including their mental and emotional health, 2) fraud - to provide timely and topical information and resources on the top scams effecting Veterans, 3) work and jobs - to improve the job-hunting journey of Veterans and Military Families, including Veteran women and Military spouses, and 4) earned benefits - to empower VMF communities to maximize earned benefits in both the military and civilian worlds, including the navigation of health care options. We envision that the proposed commission would address these as well as other vital aspects of Veteran and Military Family life.

Veterans and Military Families dedicate their lives to protecting the wellbeing of their fellow Americans. This commitment does not end when they leave formal service but continues with them forever. AARP believes we must honor the service and acknowledge the sacrifice of our Veterans and Military Families. Senate Bill 88 does so, by establishing a commission of and for Veterans to research and develop a plan that will provide the unique supports that Veterans and Military Families need to comfortably thrive in Maryland.



AARP Maryland respectfully requests a favorable report for SB 88. For questions or additional information, please feel free to contact Tammy Bresnahan, Senior Director of Advocacy at tbresnahan@aarp.org or by calling 410-302-8451. Thank You!

SB 88 - MD Comm on Vets & MilFams LOS (2).pdf

Uploaded by: Morgan Murphy

Position: FAV



Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Office of the Secretary

WES MOORE
GOVERNOR

ARUNA MILLER
LT. GOVERNOR

ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY

January 17, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: SB 88 - Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families

Dear Chairman Feldman and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs supports SB 88 - Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families.

The MDVA believes veterans and active service members are more likely to thrive in Maryland when their families are healthy and resilient. It is for this reason we launched Maryland Joins Forces which is an initiative designed to mobilize partners across sectors to meaningfully address issues affecting veteran and military families.

This commission will develop and implement a plan to make Maryland the best state for veterans & military families. Particularly solutions that address the following:

- **Employment:** Reduce military spouses unemployment and make it easier for them to transition to the state without disruptions to their careers.
- **Food and Housing:** Ensure no military connected family experiences food insecurity and eliminate homelessness amongst veteran families.
- **Education:** Members of the military connected community gain the skills and credentials they need to find meaningful employment and contribute to a thriving Maryland economy and military connected kids are able to integrate seamlessly into Maryland K-12 schools.
- **Health & Wellness:** Military connected families live healthier lives - both physically and mentally with increased access to health and wellness resources.
- **Service:** Increase the number of opportunities for members of the military-connected community to serve alongside their non-military connected neighbors to reduce the civil-military divide.

THE WINELAND BUILDING, FOURTH FLOOR
16 FRANCIS STREET, ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TOLL FREE: 866-793-1577 • ANNAPOLIS: 410-260-3838 • FAX: 410-216-7928

veterans.maryland.gov
TTY USERS CALL VIA MD RELAY

Passing this bill will help us maintain Governor Moore's pledge to make 2024 the Year for Military Families. We look forward to working with this commission to design, study, develop, and implement solutions to pressing challenges within the military-connected community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony Woods". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A" and a distinct "W".

Anthony C. Woods
Secretary

SB 88 - FAV_ ARMY ALLIANCE.pdf

Uploaded by: Sarah Joan Smith

Position: FAV

Bryson F. Popham, P.A.

Bryson F. Popham, Esq.

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January 17, 2024

The Honorable Brian J. Feldman
Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
2 West, Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: Senate Bill 88 - Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families - Favorable

Dear Chair Feldman, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Army Alliance, a nonprofit advocacy organization whose sole mission is to provide support for one of our major military installations in the State – the Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG). From its founding in 1917, APG has grown into the central research facility for the United States Army, one of a number of such military installations in our State.

The defense industry is one of the most important elements of our State economy. Anchored by major installations such as APG, the industry provides a large number of professional, highly compensated jobs for those who work in uniform and the substantially higher number of private sector individuals who support them. Within the APG ecosystem, for example, there are approximately 2,000 uniform military personnel supported by over 20,000 civilian support staff. APG and its surrounding defense community comprise the largest employer in Northeastern Maryland.

Senate Bill 88 represents a new legislative initiative in support of the defense community in Maryland. By identifying the primary mission of developing *and implementing* (emphasis added) a strategic plan to make Maryland the best State for veterans and military families, the bill clearly states its simple goal. The bill therefore represents, for the first time in memory, a public statement of our collective commitment to constant improvement of State policies to achieve this status. Importantly, the bill also is structured to measure performance by comparing Maryland to other states.

The Army Alliance enthusiastically supports both the object of the bill and the metrics by which its future performance will be measured. We respectfully request a favorable report on Senate Bill 88.

Very truly yours,



Bryson F. Popham

cc: Mike Ray, President, Army Alliance
Jill McClune, Past President, Army Alliance
Lisa Swoboda, Senior Director, Office of Military & Federal Affairs Maryland

DG Written Testimony_SB0088.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Gile

Position: FAV



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB0088 - Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families

Mr. Chair, Madame Vice Chair, and Members of the Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee:

SB0088 establishes the Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families, which will be staffed by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA). The commission must (1) study and make recommendations for developing and implementing a statewide strategic plan to make Maryland the best state for veterans and military families, including legislative and budgetary recommendations and (2) identify key performance indicators to assess the quality of life for veterans and military families in Maryland relative to other states. The commission must report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2024.

Background

As Governor Moore declared, 2024 is the year for military families in Maryland. As a longtime advocate for military families and the spouse of a 24-year veteran of the U.S. Army, I am elated by this announcement. In collaboration with the Administration including Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Anthony Woods, I am proud to sponsor key bills aimed at providing tangible support for Maryland veterans and military families. One significant initiative is the renaming of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs to the Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families to better reflect the agency's mission. Additionally, I am sponsoring a bill to designate military status, including as a military spouse, a protected class for hiring purposes. The combined impact of these bills, alongside the one currently under consideration before this Committee, significantly advances the realization of our shared vision: positioning Maryland as a leader among military-friendly states.

An integral aspect of bringing this vision to life is the establishment of a framework where stakeholders can converge, exchange ideas, and outline a strategic course for both the Administration and the General Assembly. This includes developing tangible steps needed to make Maryland an attractive place to live and work for veterans and military families. That's what SB0088 is all about.

Solution

SB0088, which is based on a bill passed into law by Virginia and made at the request of Secretary Woods, would:

- Create a commission comprised of:
 - Members of the General Assembly
 - The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, or the Secretary's designee;
 - The Adjutant General, or the Adjutant General's designee;
 - The chair of the Maryland Veterans Commission, or the chair's designee;
 - The chair of the Maryland Veterans' Home Commission, or the chair's designee;
 - The chair of the Maryland College Collaboration for Student Veterans Commission, or the chair's designee; and
 - Representatives that advocate on behalf of women veterans and members of the Armed Forces (not including the National Guard).
- Study and make recommendations for developing and implementing a statewide strategic plan to make Maryland the best state for veterans and military families, including legislative and budgetary recommendations.
- Identify key performance indicators to assess the quality of life for veterans and military families in Maryland relative to other states.
- Report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly by December 1, 2024.

Per the Fiscal Note, SB0088 has a marginal one-time expense to the state. However, the Fiscal Note makes clear that if the Commission completes its work after submitting its report (as expected), the contractual position may terminate earlier, and expenditures may be reduced.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report on SB0088.

SB 88- Maryland Commission on Veterans and Militar

Uploaded by: Jane Krienke

Position: FWA



Maryland
Hospital Association

January 18, 2024

To: The Honorable Brian J. Feldman, Chair, Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Re: Letter of Support with Amendments- Senate Bill 88 - Maryland Commission on Veterans and Military Families

Dear Chair Feldman:

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association's (MHA) 62 member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of Senate Bill 88.

Maryland hospitals are experiencing historic workforce shortages, with one in every five nurse positions vacant. A 2022 [GlobalData](#) report estimates a statewide shortage of 5,000 full-time registered nurses and 4,000 licensed practical nurses. Without intervention, shortages could double or even triple by 2035. MHA's [2022 State of Maryland's Health Care Workforce report](#) outlines a roadmap to ensure Maryland has the health care workforce it needs now and into the future.

The report recommends Maryland leverage the state's military bases by launching a "Green to Blue" campaign to help discharged and retired military personnel with caregiver experience work in hospitals. We must invite every qualified health care worker to join the workforce. This includes our service members who have valuable training and experience. Easing the transition to working in a civilian capacity would benefit the entire health care system.

Senate Bill 88 would create a Commission to develop and implement a strategic plan to make Maryland an attractive state for veterans and military families. We recommend adding a representative with experience in workforce development, such as a member of the Governor's Workforce Development Board, and a representative with experience in health care careers and/or education. We also suggest the Commission explore how to reduce barriers to education and careers to help service members and their families transition into civilian roles. This is particularly important for careers in high-need industries like health care.

This bill could help ensure Maryland does not lose qualified health care workers with valuable experience to neighboring states.

For these reasons, we request a *favorable* report on SB 88.

For more information, please contact:

Jane Krienke, Senior Legislative Analyst, Government Affairs
Jkrienke@mhaonline.org