

UPLOAD SB411- Name Change Testimony.pdf

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Position: FAV



**Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Secretary**

**WES MOORE
GOVERNOR**

**ARUNA MILLER
LT. GOVERNOR**

**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF Senate Bill 411
Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs
Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
February 8, 2024**

Thank you Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and members of the committee.

I am honored to appear before you today and I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on SB411, a bill that renames my Department to the Department of Veterans and Military Families. I'm grateful to Senator Gile and Delegate Pruski for introducing this bill.

I am Tony Woods, Secretary of Veterans Affairs and I lead the Department of Veterans Affairs. My Department's mission is to "assist veterans, active duty service members, their families and dependents, in securing benefits earned through military service." In my first year in this role, I have spent time listening to each of those communities - and more.

While my Department serves Maryland's military families, I understood that we were not doing enough. There are real challenges associated with the military lifestyle, and the State of Maryland has a role to play.

Blue Star Families, a prominent advocate for military families, has illuminated the numerous challenges faced by veteran and military families. Their annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey exposed financial hardships, housing concerns, food security, and the disproportionately high unemployment rates among spouses. These issues, compounded by the unique aspects of military life, demand our attention and action.

Our state is home to more than 60,000 active-duty military family members, not to mention veteran caregivers and survivors whom we serve too.

Our commitment to addressing these challenges is reflected in our support of this legislation. This bill seeks to rename the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Department of Veterans and Military Families, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support. By enhancing the department's capacity to coordinate programs dedicated to military families, we send a resounding message that Maryland is united in welcoming and supporting those who have served.

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veterans.maryland.gov
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This won't just be backed by words. This bill ensures that a Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs can address the unique needs of our military and veteran families.

In this pivotal moment, let us bridge the gap between words and action, ensuring that the resilience of military families, caregivers, and survivors is met with tangible support.

I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on SB411 to ensure that we can serve ALL of those who serve and create a Maryland where no one is left behind.

Sincerely,

Anthony C. Woods
Secretary

Maryland Military Coalition SB0411 Favorable.2.pdf

Uploaded by: Jayson Spiegel

Position: FAV



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 6, 2024

Honorable Marc Korman
Chair, Education, Energy and Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report** – HB411 – Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs

Dear Chair Korman and Members of the 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 *SB0411 – Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs*, sponsored by Senator Gile.

This legislation is a critical component of Governor Moore’s commitment to make 2024 the Year of the Military Family in Maryland. As Governor Moore said in December 2023, “Our military families sacrifice everything so their loved ones can serve. They are just as much a part of the American story as those in the armed forces. . . . States have a duty to answer the service and sacrifice of our military families with strong support.”

Currently, Maryland is home to:

- 14,292 active-duty spouses
- 28,070 active-duty children
- 10,924 National Guard and Reserve spouses
- 17,095 National Guard and Reserve children
- 51,835 military retirees; and 6,348 survivors¹

Accordingly, there are a significant number of military family members in Maryland, with needs that the State can help address.

¹ * As of December 31, 2022, <https://public.militaryonesource.mil/state-policymakers-inquiry>

Renaming the Department is more than a symbolic act. It is a demonstration of Maryland's commitment to military families and developing policies and initiatives that address their concerns and needs. We strongly support creating a new position of Deputy Secretary for Military Family Policy and Programs. Establishing a Deputy Secretary focused on military families ensures that the military families' portfolio does not become an additional duty for the existing Deputy Secretary. Instead, the bill ensures that a senior official reporting directly to the Secretary is focused on the unique needs of military families. We anticipate that the new Deputy Secretary could become the state-wide focus for activities, research, outreach and support for spouses and military children. The MMC is excited about working with the new Deputy Secretary following enactment of the legislation.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports** HB0341 and asks for a ***FAVORABLE*** report from the Health and Government Operations Appropriations Committee. This bill supports the Moore-Miller Administration's Year of the Military Families, helping to move Maryland to the forefront of supporting those who serve alongside our Service Members.

The Moore-Miller administration has consistently supported transitioning Service Members and their families. This legislation goes a long way in demonstrating the administration's commitment to those currently serving, Veterans, retirees, their family members and their survivors.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups, representing over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers, and survivors.

We want to thank Senator Gile for sponsoring this legislation and her personal commitment to support the uniformed services community including families, 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 F. 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

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Uploaded by: Kathryn Roth-Douquet

Position: FAV



Blue Star Families

bluestarfam.org

Maryland Senate

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

Testimony of Kathy Roth-Douquet

Founder & CEO

Blue Star Families

February 8, 2024

Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan, and distinguished Members of the Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today in support of SB 0411.

I am the co-Founder and CEO of Blue Star Families— the nation’s largest and fastest growing military family support organization, with 275,000 members in our network and impacting more than 1.5 million military family members every year.

Since we founded in 2009, there has been a slow dawning of awareness of the need to respond to military families’ contributions, challenges, and sacrifices.

In 2009 I found myself simply adding the phrase “and military families” after “Veterans” when others spoke. So standing here today, 15 years later, on the cusp of Maryland committing to become the first state in the nation to formally expand the scope of its Veterans Department in order to strengthen military family support feels like a landmark moment.

The steps Maryland is considering here today would set a new bar for the rest of the nation, so we can all ***Do Our Part*** to preserve the All Volunteer Force.

But it’s not just passion underlying my excitement. It’s data.

We know that when communities effectively support military families, that effort has far-reaching implications, improving the well-being of our military and our national security but also improving our communities.

70% of active duty military families and 100% of Guard and reserve families live in civilian communities, not on a military installation.

Our research shows that families who feel those in their community understand, respect and support them have greater wellbeing and a higher likelihood of recommending military service. These families are more likely to settle in these communities and enhance the community's economic vibrance.

Military installations contribute billions of dollars to Maryland's economy. This new name signals to those who make basing decisions how seriously the state takes its responsibility to service members wellbeing.

By broadening the scope to include "Military Families" in the Department's name, Maryland demonstrates a groundbreaking approach to the well-being of the entire military community.

Members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak here today and to show my support for SB 0411. I am happy to answer any questions.

SB411_Letter of Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Matt Power

Position: FAV



Letter of Support

Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee *Senate Bill 411 (Gile) Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs*

Matt Power, President
mpower@micua.org
February 8, 2024

On behalf of the member institutions of the Maryland Independent College and University Association (MICUA) and the nearly 55,000 students we serve, I thank you for the opportunity to provide this letter of written testimony in support of [Senate Bill 411 \(Gile\) Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs](#). The bill renames the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) to the Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) and the Secretary of Veterans to be the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families. MDVA, in partnership with the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC), is required to actively assist veterans and their dependents to access education and training benefits.

The Maryland College Collaboration for Student Veterans Commission was established in 2016 (Ch.413 of 2016), and MICUA is a designated representative on the Commission. The Commission’s work consists of “ensuring the educational success of returning veterans, including their recruitment, successful transition into higher education, retention, and eventual graduation.” The Legislature passed the Veterans Advocacy and Education Act (Ch. 73 of 2022) to create a central location within MDVA for veterans to learn more about the various educational opportunities in the State and improve access to obtain a college degree and training for the workforce. SB 411 would capture in name the impact and goals of MDVA which is to support the educational pursuits of veterans and their families. Several MICUA institutions have deep connections to military bases located in close proximity and they have demonstrated a strong commitment to provide a supportive school environment for all students, including veterans and their families.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Irnande Altema, Associate Vice President for Government and Business Affairs, ialtema@micua.org.

For these reasons, MICUA urges a favorable Committee report for Senate Bill 411.

SB411.DD Council.Support.pdf

Uploaded by: Rachel London

Position: FAV



**Maryland Developmental
Disabilities Council**

CREATING CHANGE · IMPROVING LIVES

**Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee
SB411: Department of Veterans Affairs – Renaming and Deputy Secretary of
Military Family Policy and Programs
February 8, 2024
Position: Support**

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council) is an independent, public policy organization that creates changes to make it possible for people with developmental disabilities to live the lives they want with the support they need. We focus on children and adults with developmental disabilities and their families, including military families.

WHAT does this legislation do?

- Renames the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Department of Veterans and Military Families.
- Requires the Secretary to appoint a Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs.

WHY is this important?

- **There are over 60,000 active duty, National Guard, and reserve members in Maryland.**
- **Those active duty, National Guard, and reserve members have over 45,000 children.ⁱ**
- The CDC estimates that nearly 9% of children ages 3-17 years old has one or more developmental disability.ⁱⁱ In Maryland, that possibly means about **5,400 of the children of active duty, National Guard, and reserve members of the military have a developmental disability.**
- At least one study of the effects of military deployment on children suggests that **there is a relationship between parent deployment and adverse risk for developmental delays and disabilities in children.ⁱⁱⁱ**
- The sooner, and more often families get the information, resources, and services and support they need and want, the more likely they are to live and thrive in Maryland.

The Need to Focus on Military Families

- Our work includes outreach and connections to groups related to our priorities and mission, such supporting families of people with developmental disabilities. That led us to partner with the Department of Veterans Affairs in a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).
- We are collaborating because **military families of children and adults with developmental disabilities have unique needs.** We will learn from military families and veteran families who have family members with a developmental disability about what they need and want.
- We are also collaborating because **information and resources are available, but not targeted to military and veteran families.** We will develop information and resources based on what we learn from this community to build and share a toolkit about the services and supports available to people with developmental disabilities of all ages

Refocusing the Department to veterans **and** military families, as well as establishing a high-level position focuses on the policies and programs that impact their lives, and strengthens the commitment to those families. **For these reasons, the Council supports SB 411, and looks forward to our continued**

partnership to make sure state systems welcome, value, and support military families who have family members with developmental disabilities.

Contact: Rachel London, Executive Director, RLondon@md-council.org

ⁱ December 2022, Military State Policy Source. <<https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/state/MD>>

ⁱⁱ July 2023, NCHS Data Brief No. 473 < <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db473.pdf>>

ⁱⁱⁱ Nguyen, et al. The Effects of Military Deployment on Early Childhood Development. The US Army Medical Department Journal. Oct-Dec 2014, pgs. 81-86.

DG Written Testimony_SB0411.pdf

Uploaded by: Senator Gile

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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

Testimony in Support of SB0411 - Department of Veterans Affairs - Renaming and Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs

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

Over the last several months, I worked with Secretary Anthony Woods to discuss ways that the Department of Veterans Affairs could better serve veterans and military families, and I am so grateful for his leadership and commitment to enhancing support for our military families, who also play an integral role in our Nation's defense. SB0411, developed in conjunction with Secretary Woods, would rename the Department of Veteran Affairs to the Department of Veterans and Military Families. This small measure clarifies its mission to support both veterans and their families. Additionally, the bill mandates the appointment of a Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs.

As a military family advocate and a proud military spouse, this bill holds personal significance for me. Despite some increasingly more support structures in our state for military families, there is significant opportunity for improvement. SB0411 represents a tangible step towards acknowledging and addressing the diverse needs of all members within the military community.

This proposed change not only signifies a commitment to inclusivity but also serves as a beacon for military families, signaling that the Department is dedicated to providing comprehensive support. By renaming the Department of Veteran Affairs to the Department of Veterans and Military Families, we affirm our recognition of the vital role played by military families in our nation's defense.

Moreover, the creation of a Deputy Secretary of Military Family Policy and Programs underscores our commitment to expanding resources and programming tailored specifically for military families. It presents an opportunity to bridge existing gaps and bolster the support network available to those who have served and sacrificed for our country.

While the prospect of additional funding for this position is acknowledged, it is imperative that we prioritize the allocation of resources to ensure the successful implementation of these vital initiatives. The potential impact of this bill on the lives of military families cannot be overstated.

In conclusion, SB0411 represents a significant milestone in our ongoing efforts to better serve and support the military families who selflessly stand alongside their loved ones in service to our nation.