



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.