



# MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

*Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy*

February 16, 2024

Honorable Pamela G. Beidle  
Chair, Finance Committee  
3 East  
Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

## **Request for a FAVORABLE Report - SB 412 – Mental Health Law – County Mental Health Advisory Committees – Membership -**

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I am providing written testimony in support of SB 412. I am a nurse and I currently serve on the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families.

Senate Bill 412 alters the membership of a county's mental health advisory committee by including an *individual with experience with mental health care for veterans*, or *someone currently serving*. Having served on active duty for 30 years, after first being a military spouse, I know the challenges facing the military community. These include: long hours and high task demands; repeated exposure to trauma; danger and loss; frequent moves; spousal job loss when going through a permanent change of station move; frequent school moves for children; and repeated, long deployments requiring single parenting. These stressors are similar for families of national guard members as well as federal reservist who can also be called up to active duty. T

Being a service member who is currently serving, a veteran, or a family member of someone in the service isn't a "job" –it's a lifestyle that comes with multiple stressors. These stressors are unique from other regular "jobs", and they also affect the family members, not just the service member. According to the Centers for Disease Control's most recent data, **Maryland had 620 suicides in 2021<sup>1</sup>; of which 89 were veterans<sup>2</sup>.**

The addition of a provider with experience in mental health care of veterans or the inclusion of someone currently serving who understands these stressors on the committee makes very good sense. Who better to scrutinize or encourage program interventions and support services to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Suicide Mortality by State](#).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, [State-Level Veteran Suicide Data](#): 2021 Update

SB 412– County Mental Health Advisory Committees – **Favorable**

that they meet the needs of those currently serving or those who have previously served and their families? The Governor’s Challenge Team is working to do just that. We have developed an action plan designed to combat the serious issue of suicide in the military connected community—that includes training for providers, improved screening tools and recommended best practices.

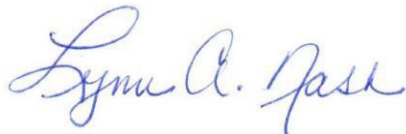
There is also something very appealing about this bill, in light of the current fiscal challenges of the state-- this bill is **procedural** and **has no financial requirements**.

Maryland is home to 34,444 active-duty service members, 14,292 active-duty spouses and 25,642 reservists/national guard members with 28,019 family members<sup>3</sup>. In addition, there are 355,787 veteran households<sup>4</sup>. These are Department of Defense numbers only and do not reflect the 1,200 U.S. Public Health Service and NOAA officers currently serving, or the 8,000 retirees and their families, who also live with similar duty situations. **County mental health advisory committees should include someone with experience providing mental health services to this specific segment of the population.**

The Maryland Military Coalition, is a voluntary, non-partisan organization representing 21 veteran service organizations who, in turn, serve over 150,000 Maryland uniformed services men and women and their families. **The Coalition strongly supports** SB 412 County Mental Health Advisory Committees - Membership and asks for your **FAVORABLE report**.

The Coalition thanks Senator Gile for her sponsorship of this important legislation and her continued support of the uniformed service community.

Respectfully,



Lynn A. Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN  
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service  
Communications Director

Enclosure: Maryland Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2021

Maryland Military Coalition Member Organizations Follow

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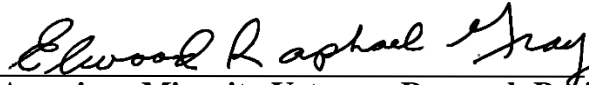
<sup>3</sup> [Military One Source](#), as of December 31, 2022

<sup>4</sup> [VA Claim Insider](#), August 10, 2023

Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition

  
Air Force Sergeants Association

  
American Military Society

  
American Minority Veterans Research Project

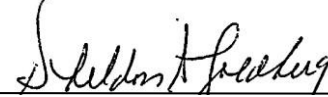
  
Association of the United States Navy


  
Commissioned Officers Association of the  
US Public Health Service

  
Disabled American Veterans

  
Distinguished Flying Cross Association

  
Fleet Reserve Association

  
Jewish War Veterans of the USA

  
Maryland Air National Guard Retirees'  
Association

  
Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

  
Military Officers Association of America


  
Military Order of the Purple Heart

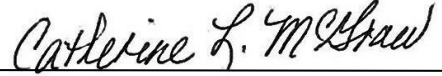
  
Montford Point Marines of America

  
National Association for Black Veterans

  
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

  
NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

  
Reserve Organization of America

  
Society of Military Widows

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

  
Veterans of Foreign Wars