



Statement of CAPTAIN (R) Lynn A. Nash
SB 478 - Families Serve Act
February 29, 2024
FAVORABLE with Amendment

Dear Chair Beidle and members of the Senate Finance Committee

Good afternoon.

I stand before you on behalf of the 1,700 active-duty U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Officers, our 7,000 retired PHS service members, and their family members who live in Maryland. I am providing testimony on the Families Serve Act. My name is CAPT (R) Lynn Nash, and I am a retired PHS Officer and a lifetime member of the Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service. While I represent PHS officers on the Maryland Military Coalition, today I am here on behalf of COA and PHS families. I have lived in Montgomery County since 1995 and I made a conscious choice to remain in Maryland when I retired after 30 years of service in both the U.S. Army and the PHS.

In December, the Governor and Lt. Governor declared 2024 as the Year of the Military Family. In late January, the President offered SB 478 on behalf of the administration. When I read the bill, I was dismayed. While the intention of the bill was to offer a spousal hiring preference in state government positions to service spouses, something that the Coalition had offered as one of its legislative priorities at our listening session in November, what I read was a tangling of terms.

As you well know, legislation is all about the definition of terms. In my view, SB 478 is frankly a mess. I would like to point out why I am concerned as well as the needed technical changes to bring this bill into compliance with **existing state law**.

In 1984, then Governor Hughes promulgated §1-117, Article 1 of Section 28 of the Annotated Code of Maryland. Article 1 states:

WITH RESPECT TO ANY STATE PROGRAM OF BENEFITS, RIGHTS, OR PRIVILEGES APPLICABLE TO A VETERAN UNDER THIS CODE, THE TERM "VETERAN" INCLUDES MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSIONED CORPS OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE AND THE COMMISSIONED CORPS OF THE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION (OR ITS PREDECESSOR, THE COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY) IF ELIGIBLE UNDER §101, TITLE 38 OF THE U.S. CODE.

As currently written, **SB 478 breaks faith with USPHS and NOAA officers** who have devoted years to protect and defend the constitution, as well as protect the health and changing environment of our Nation. Do you know that we take the same oath? We just don't work for the Department of Defense.

SB 478—Families Serve Act - **Favorable with Amendments**

SB 478 does exactly the opposite of the Governor's manta—as currently written, **SB 478 leaves Public Health Service and NOAA spouses BEHIND.**

As someone who has served in a military service and a uniformed service, perhaps I'm sensitive to terms. The terms military, armed forces, armed services and uniformed services are separate and distinct. They are codified by law and they are NOT interchangeable.

You've heard the statistics about service spouse unemployment—I don't need to repeat them. I've testified before you on other similar measures, you know that I care about this topic.

This bill needs technical changes. I am simply asking that you make the needed changes to comport this bill with existing Maryland code. **Correcting the language in SB 478 does not cost anything** and passing an amended bill will do much to help service spouses, including those married to a PHS or NOAA officer, get meaningful employment as well as fill existing government vacancies with much needed talent.

I ask for a favorable report with amendments. Please don't leave us behind.