



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

Statement of CAPT Lynn Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN
SB 412 - Mental Health Law – County Mental Health Advisory Committees
February 16, 2024

FAVORABLE

Dear Chair Beidle and Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I am here to testify on behalf of this bill, as well as answer any questions that you might have. For the record, my name is CAPT (R) Lynn Nash. I am a nurse and I currently serve on the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans and Families.

SB 412 bill 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 uniformed services community. These include: long hours and high task demands; repeated exposure to trauma, danger and loss; frequent moves that often result in 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.

Being a service member serving 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 2021¹; of which 89 were veterans².

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 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

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

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

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connected community—that includes training for providers, improved screening tools and recommended best practices.

There is 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 members³. In addition, there are 355,787 veteran households⁴. 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 conditions. **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 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. The Coalition **strongly supports** SB 412– County Mental Health Advisory Committees **and asks for a favorable report**.

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

Thank you.

³ [Military One Source](#), as of December 31, 2022

⁴ [VA Claim Insider](#), August 10, 2023