



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 13, 2024

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report** – HB0598 – Discrimination – Military Status - Prohibition

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the Health and Government Operations Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report** by the Committee on **HB0598 – Discrimination – Military Status - Prohibition**, sponsored by Delegate Adrian Boafu.

The bill represents part of Governor Moore's commitment to make 2024 the Year of the Military Family in Maryland. As the Governor said in December 2023:

Our military families are sacrificing just as much as our people in uniform," Moore said. "And they're sacrificing so their loved ones can serve. ... They are doing it both for the love of family and for the love of country. ... States have a duty to answer the service and sacrifice of our military families with strong support.

HB0598 would broadly prohibit discrimination against service members, veterans, and military family members "with regard to public accommodation, housing, employment, financial transactions, education, insurance, the provision of public utility services and State personnel actions." This sweeping legislation would amend the Maryland code in line with the Department of Defense goal "of ensuring that service members and families be protected through state anti-discrimination measures that protect against bias and discrimination in such matters as employment, housing, education, public utilities and civil rights laws to supplement employment protections under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act."¹

The breadth of the bill will ensure that no service member or military family member can be discriminated against by virtue of their status as a service member, veteran, or military family member. Adding "military status" as a class protected in state education, housing, public utilities,

¹ <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/StatePolicy/pdfs/2024/bestpractices-militaryfamilyantidiscriminationstatus.pdf>

employment and civil rights laws is a major 2024 legislative objective of the Department of Defense Military State Policy Program.²

The focus of our testimony is the bill's provisions prohibiting discrimination in employment against military spouses. Active-duty military spouses often encounter unique challenges in employment. The statistics on active-duty spousal employment are sobering:

- 67% of all active-duty spouses work
- Of them, over 50% work in the health industry
- Average time to look for a job in the new state = 19 weeks **OR** \$12,374 per year in lost wages trying to find work in a new state.
- Active-duty spouses earn 26.8% less in income than their non-military counterparts
- **22% are unemployed** compared to 3.6% nationwide pre-pandemic

Maryland is home to 14,292 active-duty spouses³ who need our support in obtaining and keeping meaningful employment in their chosen fields.

Unfortunately, active-duty spouses may suffer discrimination in employment. Employers may be unwilling to hire a fully qualified active-duty spouse for a variety of alleged reasons, including:

- Expectation that the active duty spouse will leave within three years when their service member receives a new assignment
- Gaps in employment when the spouse could not find work at a new assignment
- Difficulty in verifying employment and employment references if the spouse worked overseas
- Concern about the spouse's availability for work if the service member deploys with little notice

As Senator Dawn Gile stated during the Governor's announcement in December, "as a proud military spouse, I have witnessed the resilience of fellow military spouses as they navigate persistent obstacles in their professional journeys. ... This isn't merely the right thing to do; it's a crucial investment in our state's military community and an imperative for the recruitment, readiness, and retention of military servicemembers."

The MMC strongly supports HB0598 and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report from the Health and Government Operations Committee. This legislation will outlaw employment discrimination against active-duty military spouses. The bill adds the status of being a "military dependent" as defined in 50 U.S.C. § 3911(4) to the list of individuals and classes protected from discrimination in employment. We are grateful to Delegate Boafu for sponsoring this legislation and for ensuring that the definition of "military spouse" covers all the **uniformed services** – Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Space Force, and Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Upon

² <https://statepolicy.militaryonesource.mil/priorities/military-family-anti-discrimination-status>

³ This number only reflects armed forces spouses. There are over 1,000 Commissioned Officers of the Public Health Services in Maryland, a significant number of whom are married.

enactment of the legislation by both chambers and signature by the Governor, discrimination in hiring against military spouses will be unlawful.

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 Delegate Bofo for sponsoring this legislation and for his continued strong support of the uniformed services community and 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

Stacy P. May
American Military Society

Elwood R. Raphael Gray
American Minority Veterans Research Project

A. A.
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. Hedberg
Distinguished Flying Cross Association

Phyllis J. Collins
Fleet Reserve Association

Seldon H. Hedberg
Jewish War Veterans of the USA

Steve L. Bloodwin
Maryland Air National Guard Retirees'
Association

Emmett R. Robert
Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Robert F. Winton
Military Officers Association of America

Charles E. Speltz
Military Order of the Purple Heart

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National Association for Black Veterans

Michael P. Hays
Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

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NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

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