



January 23, 2024

Chairwoman Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and distinguished members of the Health and Government Operations Committee,

The National Alliance on Mental Illness, Maryland and our 11 local affiliates across the state represent a statewide network of more than 58,000 families, individuals, community-based organizations, and service providers. NAMI Maryland is a non-profit that is dedicated to providing education, support, and advocacy for persons with mental illnesses, their families and the wider community.

NAMI believes that persons with mental illnesses who are veterans, on active military duty, in the National Guard, or in the Reserves, as well as their families, should receive the same full range of integrated diagnosis, treatment services, and supports across a continuum of care as should be available to all people with serious mental illnesses.

We thank Delegate Pruski for his work on the bill and recognize the impact it will have on providing appropriate and accessible services for Veterans in the State. Establishing a Commission to make Maryland the best state for veterans and military families is the best way to achieve this goal.

NAMI recognizes that veterans with mental illnesses face discrimination as well as higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than in the general population. Although the State has been a leader in Veteran services for many years, many Maryland veterans struggle to get the help that they require. As such, we encourage the development of solutions that alleviate the current lack of access to adequate resources for veterans.

While we support the inclusion of members currently listed within the bill, we believe that including a representative of NAMI Maryland to the Commission would also be beneficial. NAMI currently hosts a wide variety of free behavioral and mental health resources for Marylanders. This includes the NAMI Homefront program, created specifically for the families of Service Members and Veterans dealing with mental illness. NAMI Maryland was selected to pilot this program because of the success we have had reaching military families.

NAMI Homefront focuses on the unique needs of military and veteran communities, such as post-deployment and post-discharge transitions. The course is designed to help family members understand and support their loved one while maintaining their own well-being.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable report with an amendment that includes a representative of NAMI Maryland to be added to the Commission on Veterans and Military Families.

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