



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 8, 2024

Honorable Josline A. Pena-Melnyk
Chair, House Health and Government Operations
Room 241
House Office Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Request for a FAVORABLE Report: HB 378 – State Board of Dietetic Practice - Dietician-Nutritionists - Licensure Requirements

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

On behalf of the Maryland Military Coalition and as its Communications Director, I am providing written testimony in support of HB 378 Dietician and Nutritionist- Licensure Requirements and I am asking for your favorable report. This bill modifies the licensure requirements from having a bachelor's degree, to a master's or doctoral degree from an accredited college or university; requires a supervised clinical experience; and, submission of proof of certification as a Nutrition Specialist OR registration with the Commission on Dietetic Registration of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

Like the rest of the nation, Maryland is experiencing an obesity epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹, the rate of obesity here is 33.2%, joining 21 other states, Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands who have rates between 30-35%. Obesity increases the risk for high blood pressure and high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, asthma and sleep apnea, joint problems and gallstones and gallbladder disease. Annual obesity-related medical care costs in the United States, in 2019 dollars, were estimated to be nearly \$173 billion². Annual nationwide productivity costs of obesity-related absenteeism range between \$3.38 billion (\$79 per individual with obesity) and \$6.38 billion (\$132 per individual with obesity)³.

Obesity also affects military readiness. Nineteen percent (19%) of active-duty service members had obesity in 2020, up from 16% in 2015. These individuals are less likely to be medically ready to deploy. Between 2008 and 2017, active-duty soldiers had more than 3.6 million musculoskeletal

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Adult Obesity Prevalence Maps](#)

² Ward ZJ, Bleich SN, Long MW, Gortmaker SL (2021) [Association of body mass index with health care expenditures in the United States by age and sex.](#)

³ Trogdon JG, Finkelstein EA, Hylands T, Dellea PS, Kamal-Bahl. Indirect costs of obesity: a review of the current literature. *Obes Rev.*2008;9(5):489–500

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injuries. One study found that active-duty soldiers with obesity were 33% more likely to get this type of injury⁴.

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 members⁵. These are Department of Defense numbers and do not reflect the 1,200 U.S. Public Health Service or NOAA officers and their families, who also live with similar duty situations. In addition, there are 355,787 veteran households⁶.

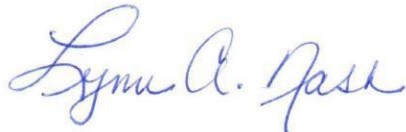
The fact of the matter is that a primary care provider can't reasonably fit weight counseling into a fifteen-minute appointment. Instead, most opt to turn their patient over to a specialist who can better provide the patient with guidance and a plan. Like every other type of health provider, Maryland is critically short of dieticians and nutritionist.

This bill establishes a higher threshold of education for our dietician and nutritionist specialist. And...in this fiscal climate, this legislation is procedural and does not directly affect government finances.

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* HB 378 – State Board of Dietetic Practice - Dietician-Nutritionists - Licensure Requirements and asks for your **FAVORABLE report**.

We thank Delegate Guzzone for her sponsorship of this important legislation.

Respectfully,



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

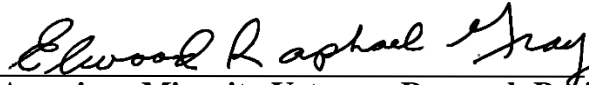
Maryland Military Coalition Member Organizations Follow

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [Unfit to Serve: Obesity and Physical Inactivity are Impacting National Security](#)

Member Organizations, Maryland Military Coalition


Air Force Sergeants Association


American Military Society


American Minority Veterans Research Project

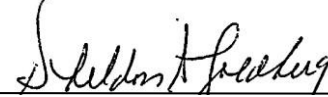

Association of the United States Navy



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