



# Commissioned Officers Association of the United States Public Health Service

*Protecting the interests of the USPHS Commissioned Corps since 1951*

February 18, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes  
The Honorable Mark S. Chang  
House Appropriations Committee  
120 Taylor House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report with Amendments – HB 691 – Tax Relief and Pensions Equality for Service Members Act**

Dear Chair Barnes, Vice Chair Chang and Members of the House Appropriations Committee:

On behalf of the Commissioned Officers Association, I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report with Amendments** by the Committee on **HB 691 – Tax Relief and Pensions Equality for Service Members Act**

This bill would update and change the application of certain provisions of law governing personnel, pensions and taxation to apply to **all uniformed services** rather than only the armed forces. It is a positive step in making the Maryland Code consistent with the U.S. Code in the use of terms related to the uniform services.

However, we ask **that the definition of “veteran” in this bill be amended** to comport with existing Maryland – General Provisions § 1-117 which states “members who served full-time in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service or the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrations are **veterans**”. Title 38 U.S. Code § 101 (2) refers only to “a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than honorable”. It is not until **sections (21)(B) and (C)** under the term “active duty” does this statute say that both the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration “...are entitled to **“full military benefits”**”. Our preference is to keep § 1-117 for clarity.

Over the past several years, I have worked relentlessly to try and remediate legislation before it is enacted to ensure that the correct terms and meaning are understood by everyone. As an

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example, last session I requested an amendment and succeeded in getting inclusion of U.S. Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration spouses into the Families Serve Act, where service spouses receive priority hiring for Maryland State Government positions. This session, I am asking for a similar amendment to the Burial Equity Act, to codify what is already happening in Maryland State Cemeteries.

Maryland is home to the headquarters of both the U.S. Public Health Service AND the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Commissioned Corps. In addition to my headquarters, U.S. Public Health Service officers serve in the Department of Health and Human Services operating administrations including the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the Health Resources and Services Administration, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as well as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, among others.

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service as well as the Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports** HB 691 and asks the Committee for a **FAVORABLE report with Amendments**.

The mission of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) is to protect and enhance the public health and safety of the United States by supporting and advancing the interests of the Commissioned Corps and its officers through advocacy, education, training and dissemination of professional information. This includes the 1398 officers, 8 Ready Reservists and over 7,000 retirees living in Maryland.

We want to thank Delegate Patterson for her commitment to our veterans and the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,



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