



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 14, 2025

The Honorable Ben Barnes
Chair, Appropriations Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Request for **FAVORABLE Report with Amendments** – HB0691 – Tax Relief and Pensions Equality for Service Members Act

Dear Chair Barnes and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report with Amendments** by the Committee on **HB0691 – Tax Relief and Pensions Equality for Service Members Act**, sponsored by Delegate Edith J. Patterson. The bill will 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 U.S. Code in the use of terms related to the uniform services**, which the MMC endorses. However, our recommendation of a FAVORABLE report with Amendments is based on the definition of “veteran” being proposed in the bill compared with that in § 1-117, Veteran, of the State Government Article of the Maryland Code.

General Provisions § 1-117 defines a veteran as an individual “eligible under 38 U.S. Code § 101, a member of the commissioned corps of: (1) the Public Health Service; or (2) the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey.” The language that is proposed in Article – State Government § 9-901 (M) uses the definition of “veteran” found in 38 U.S. Code § 101, in which § 101 (2) states that the “term ‘veteran’ means a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.” That subparagraph, **38 U.S. Code § 101 (2), by itself, does not include the commissioned corps of both the Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and could be interpreted differently from the existing definition in Maryland’s General Provisions § 1-117, which does.** The MMC believes this could lead to an interpretation that veterans who served honorably with PHS and NOAA are not eligible.

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The MMC's position is to make certain that those who have served in the PHS and NOAA continue to have the same rights and benefits as those who have served in the armed forces and received a DD Form 214 that is other than dishonorable. Our position is also to make certain that all federal and state legal references supporting the above clearly indicate the same to those who will use these references in the future. **We respectfully request that the language be amended to read that "veteran" has the meaning stated in § 1-117 of the General Provisions Article.**

The specific instances where these amendments should be made are as follows:

- Page 4, lines 12-17: restore the deleted text in § 1-117 and delete the reference to 38 U.S. Code § 101.
- Page 6, lines 22-25: amend the language to read that "veteran" has the meaning stated in § 1-117 of the General Provisions Article.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports HB0691** and asks for a **FAVORABLE report with Amendments** as noted above. Updating and implementing the proposed changes will make the Maryland Code consistent with the U.S. Code for key terms related to the uniformed services and will decrease their misuse in future legislation and policymaking.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, nonpartisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups. It represents over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers and survivors. Visit our website at <https://mdmilcoalition.org/>.

We want to thank Delegate Patterson for sponsoring this legislation and for supporting the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,



David L. Dragics
COL (Ret), U.S. Army
Legislative Director

