



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

February 6, 2025

The Honorable Bryan J. Feldman
The Honorable Cheryl C. Kagan
Education, Energy and the Environment Committee
2 West Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Request for a **FAVORABLE Report with Amendments - SB 237** – State Government – Veterans – Burial at State Veterans' Cemeteries ("**Burial Equity Act**")

Dear Chair Feldman, Vice Chair Kagan and Distinguished Members of the Senate Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

SB 237, "State Government – Veterans – Burial at State Veterans' Cemeteries (Burial Equity Act)", is a valuable measure. This no-cost legislation, sponsored by the Department of Veterans and Military Families and Governor Moore, seeks to clarify existing eligibility for burial in State cemeteries for members of the National Guard and Military Reserves. However, the current bill language is exclusive and needs amendment.

The Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) follows the eligibility requirements of the VA National Cemetery. This legislation clarifies that 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**, as stated in Maryland – General Provisions § 1-117 and Title 38 U.S. Code § 101. Further, the bill includes service members who have completed their contractual obligations as a member of the National Guard or the "**Military Reserves**" (emphasis added) under honorable terms. The use of the term "military reserves" includes only members of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard **and excludes** members of the **Ready Reserve of the U.S. Public Health Service** (Department of Health and Human Services) who are **Reserve Component** members under 28 U.S.C. § 101(24). To exclude these reservists who volunteer and place their lives on the line daily, does a huge diservice to them and their family members.

The Coalition seeks an **amendment to correct this diservice**, and offers the following language which has already been coordinated the Department and Governor Moore, and has received markup by the House Health and Government Operations Committee.

Where the bill reads:

- (line 5) "the National Guard and military reserves" replace with "**a reserve component**"

- (line 7) “National Guard and military reserves services” ... replace with “**reserve component**”. This language keeps in the spirit of the Governor’s “leave no man behind” and conforms to the DVMF-preferred use of the term “Uniformed Services”.
- Page 2 after (3) Eligible spouse add (4) **definition of reserve component**:

(4) "RESERVE COMPONENT" MEANS:

(i) THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES;

(ii) THE ARMY RESERVE;

(iii) THE NAVY RESERVE;

(iv) THE MARINE CORPS RESERVE;

(v) THE AIR NATIONAL GUARD OF THE UNITED STATES;

(vi) THE AIR FORCE RESERVE;

(vii) THE COAST GUARD RESERVE;

(viii) THE RESERVE CORPS OF THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE;

OR

(ix) ANY OTHER RESERVE SERVICE INCLUDED IN 28 U.S.C. § 101(24).

- Page 2 (lines 17-18) “Member of the National Guard or the military reserves” replace with “**reserve component**”
- Page 2 lines 25-26) “Member of the National Guard or the military reserves” replace with “**reserve component**”
- Page 2 (line 27) after armed forces add **uniformed services**.
- Page 3 (5) “Member of the National Guard or the military reserves” replace with “**reserve component**”

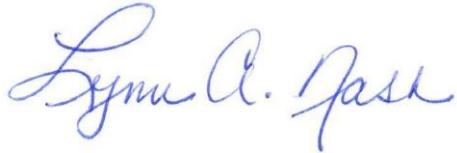
As previously stated, this bill has no fiscal consequence. Veterans and their spouses and dependents are currently not charged for burial. This legislation continues the practice of collecting a burial fee for National Guard and Reservists equal to the annual plot allowance established by the National Cemetery Administration. That fee currently is \$998.00.

We support the intent of SB 237 and ask for a **FAVORABLE report with AMENDMENT** to truly create the Burial Equity Act, by including **ALL reserve components**.

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 the Department of Veterans and Military Families and Governor Moore for their on-going support of **ALL** of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn A. Nash". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lynn A. Nash
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service
Communications Director

1 Attachment – Member Organizations of the Maryland Military Coalition



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

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Member Organizations of the 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 U.S. Public Health Service

Disabled American Veterans

Fleet Reserve Association of Annapolis

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A

Maryland Air National Guard Retirees' Association

Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Military Officers Association of America

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Military Order of the World Wars

Montford Point Marines of America

National Association of Black Veterans

National Association of Retired Federal Employees, Maryland Veterans

Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

Platoon 22

Reserve Organization of America

Society of Military Widows

Veterans of Foreign Wars

