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The Senate of Maryland ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 275 - "Modernization of Military Laws Act"

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 275.

I am very excited to be presenting a package of bills that represents the most comprehensive overhaul of military law in our state's modern history.

The package consists of 8 bills:

At the core is SB 275 - Modernization of Military Laws Act

Along with 7 other bills covering all of Maryland Laws

I have worked directly with the Uniformed Services, military advocates, federal and state agencies, military legal experts and our DLS legal counsel to draft a consensus and workable solution.

This being the first bill hearing of the package I wanted to give you an overview of what the package does:

1. **Completely restructures** Maryland's military law into the 21st century with modernized and standardized terms that are also strategically centralized in one location
2. **Establishes consistent and equal benefits** among all 8 Uniformed Services branches and reserve units, and
3. **Authorizes the Department of Veterans and Military Families** to provide support to our service members, in addition to our veterans.

The advantages are namely:

1. Updates current laws to **provide over 100 additional benefits** that were being denied to various former and current service members simply because of inconsistent and outdated terminology.
2. **Creates a centralized structure** that facilitates easy, consistent and standard military laws for future revisions.
3. **Codifies the Department's authority and duty** to support the service members.

To get an **idea of the magnitude** of this package, every legislator received a memo this past November from the Department of Veterans and Military Families highlighting 34 sections in our laws with inconsistencies in military terminology.

In contrast, this comprehensive legislative package updates more than 230 sections with over 500 revisions touching nearly every article.

But first a brief refresher on terms so my presentation makes sense:

The term '**Uniformed Services**' is comprised of 8 federal branches.

There are **6 military** branches of the Uniformed Services (~ 1.3 million active duty):

Referred to as the '**Armed forces**':

Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy and Space Force

There are **2 non-military** branches of the Uniformed Services (~6,000 active duty nationwide)

- Commissioned Corps Officers of the Public Health Services (PHS)
- Commissioned Corps Officers of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

I am sure we are all familiar with what our military branches do, but some may not realize what the other non-military branches do to protect our nation.

I won't discuss all PHS and NOAA responsibilities, but I will highlight a few tasks.

PHS sent hundreds of officers over to Afghanistan to assist during the war. Additionally, they were sent over to Africa to help when there was an Ebola outbreak to contain it.

NOAA is involved in almost every mission performed by our military through its coordination of their satellites and weather capabilities. Additionally, you may not know that NOAA was in the Gulf helping sweep for mines during the war.

And that brings me to SB 275, which is the **cornerstone** bill of the package and mainly accomplishes 7 things:

1. Standardizes military terminology – Base Definition

It standardizes terminology to federal definitions and sets a baseline for definitions. It puts a halt to defining the same term in different ways throughout different articles.

Creates Standard References to federal definitions with new definitions:

Active Duty 37 USC 101 (Title 37 Uniformed Services)

Armed Forces 10 USC 101 (Title 10 Armed Forces)

Reserve Component 37 USC 101 (Title 37 Uniformed Services)

Service member – Combination of these terms

Uniformed Services 37 USC 101 (Title 37 USC Uniformed Services)

Veteran 38 USC 101 (Title 38 Veterans)

2. Centralizes military terminology

This bill centralizes all Uniformed Services definitions in one location opposed to defining all over Maryland law.

All articles will now only reference the definitions in the Dept of Veterans and Military Families section: State Govt 9-901 and not define them in each Article
Future revisions to current definitions will be very easy and create consistency

3. Modernizes military terminology

This bill modernizes our laws by using 21st century terminology: Example

Reserve Component – Include all Uniformed Services Reserve Units. In Spring 2021, 1st officers were commissioned in PHS Ready Reserve Corps.

Veteran – Aligns with federal definition

Service Member – Expands to all Uniformed Services members

Uniformed Services ID Card – Updated from ‘military ID’ that is no longer used

4. Provides Rules of Interpretation for military terminology

This bill updates terms in the General Provision Article’s Rules of Interpretation so if there is any absence of a definition, these terms will apply... basically, a catch all for undefine terms. They all reference back to the State Govt 9-901.

5. Defines ‘Military Families’ to be inclusive of all members

This bill adds a definition of ‘military families’ as the Department changed its name last year to “*Department of Veterans and Military Families*’.

The new Department title is not inclusive of non-military families.

Therefore, this definition makes it inclusive, similar to how we define ‘military service’ in some cases that include all branches of the Uniformed Services.

This definition sets the base, not the ceiling.

6. Codifies the authority and duty to support our service members

This bill aligns law with the current practice of providing services to our service members.

It codifies existing practice for the Department’s requirements and provides statutory authorization to the Department. Used the Department’s revised mission statement in the wording of the language in the bill.

7. Incorporates ‘Uniformed Services’ where appropriate

There are inconsistent benefits scattered all across Maryland law, and this bill along with the package of bills, replace ‘armed forces’ with ‘uniformed services’ and provide equal treatment to all of our service members.

Lastly, I would note that in general, these bills are **not changing the underlying policy but providing equality among our service members**. And worked very hard to keep the **fiscal note to zero** or within all the Department’s current budget.

I could go into much greater depth but will stop there and say, “For all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration.