



MARYLAND
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

February 20, 2025

Senate Bill 309

**Department of Veterans and Military Families - Online Registry
Senate Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee**

Position: Favorable

The Maryland Catholic Conference (MCC) is the public policy representative of the three (arch)dioceses serving Maryland, which together encompass over one million Marylanders. Statewide, their parishes, schools, hospitals, and numerous charities combine to form our state's second largest social service provider network, behind only our state government.

Senate Bill 309 requires the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program in the Department of Veterans and Military Families to establish and maintain by December 31, 2025, an online registry to provide veterans, military families, and interested individuals with certain information; and requiring the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families to include certain information regarding the number of individuals on the registry, those added to registry, their status, and those unsubscribed from the registry in a certain annual report.

Military service members and their families deserve easy access to the benefits and services designed to support them. This legislation would establish a central registry providing information on available services, benefits, and updates relevant to veterans, active-duty service members, military families, and other eligible individuals. These services—including education, employment, healthcare, unemployment assistance, and recreational programs—are specifically tailored to meet the unique needs of those who serve. By creating this registry, we can enhance community outreach and strengthen the bonds within the military community. Service members share experiences and challenges that are often not widely understood outside the military. An online registry would serve as a valuable tool, fostering a sense of connection and ensuring that those who have served continue to receive the support they need.

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families already provides Veterans Benefits Specialists to assist service members and their families in navigating federal, state, and local

benefits.¹ This registry would further streamline those efforts, ensuring that eligible individuals can efficiently access the resources they've earned. As Pope Francis has stated, *"If they carry out their duty honorably, they truly contribute to the common good of the nation and the maintenance of peace."*² Supporting this legislation reaffirms the dignity of our service members and honors their sacrifices in protecting our freedoms—including the freedom to practice our faith. By ensuring they have a dedicated space to access essential benefits, we uphold our commitment to those who have selflessly served our country.

For these reasons, the Maryland Catholic Conference asks for a favorable report on **SB 309**.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ <https://myarmybenefits.us.army.mil/Benefit-Library/State/Territory-Benefits/Maryland#:~:text=Summary%20of%20Maryland%20Military%20and,are%20provided%20free%20of%20charge>.

² <https://www.usccb.org/news/2025/pope-vocation-military-and-police-defend-life-peace-justice>