January 20, 2025

Dear Senator Simonaire,

Thank you for the opportunity to support Senate Bill 275, the Modernization of Military Laws Act. I have extensive personal and professional experience in military/veteran services. During my 25+ years in this field, I have managed more than 20,000 cases supporting active-duty military, veterans, and their families during times of hardship, and various stages of career transition. I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET), a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting veterans, particularly those facing homelessness, as they transition to independent and fulfilling civilian lives.

Senate Bill 275 is a vital effort to standardize, centralize, and modernize Maryland's military laws, creating a system that works for all veterans. The benefits of this legislation are clear: it ensures equal access to benefits and services, guarantees consistent treatment, allows for easier revisions of laws in the future, and simplifies interaction with federal agencies.

For many veterans, navigating the current patchwork of policies is a daunting and frustrating experience. Military service often comes with its own language and set of procedures, but transitioning to civilian life can feel like an even greater bureaucratic maze. Veterans frequently encounter layers of jargon, conflicting definitions, and unclear processes when trying to identify and access the benefits they have earned.

At MCVET, we see firsthand how confusion and inconsistency deter veterans from seeking the help they need. Some veterans we serve are unaware of their eligibility for benefits, while others give up after facing redundant paperwork or conflicting guidance.

The Modernization of Military Laws Act addresses this by providing clarity. By establishing a single, consistent definition of "veteran" and simplifying access points, this bill empowers veterans to identify themselves and confidently access the resources and support they need.

The most common challenges, from my experience, include:

1.   Barriers to Benefits

The current system can feel inaccessible, especially for veterans with less traditional service histories or those from underrepresented groups. Standardization ensures all veterans are treated equally and equitably.

2.   A Complex Bureaucracy

Veterans often struggle to navigate the layers of federal, state, and local systems, which are not always aligned. Centralization streamlines these processes, saving time and reducing frustration.

3.   Evolving Needs

Maryland's veteran population is diverse, encompassing individuals from all walks of life. Modernization ensures our laws evolve to meet their current and future needs.

In conclusion, I urge this committee to support Senate Bill 275 and deliver on Maryland's promise to care for its veterans. By standardizing, centralizing, and modernizing our military laws, we will ensure that all veterans can access the benefits they have earned, without confusion or unnecessary barriers.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to those who have served.

Sincerely,

Misty L. Bruce

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Executive Director

Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training (MCVET)