



Statement of Maryland Rural Health Association

To the Senate Finance Committee

Chair: Senator Pamela Beidle

January 28, 2025

Senate Bill 277: Health Equity for Service Members Act

POSITION: SUPPORT

Chair Beidle, Vice Chair Hayes, Senator Simonaire, and members of the Committee, the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA) is in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 277: Health Equity for Service Members Act.

The bill's emphasis on providing behavioral health services supported by the Sheila E. Hixon Behavioral Health Services Matching Grant Program for Service Members and Veterans is critical. Maryland is currently home to 360,000 veterans and 100,000 active-duty service members, Reservists, National Guard, and dependents (Landing Zone Maryland, n.d.). Uniformed service members and veterans often face unique mental health challenges, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety, as a result of their service obligations and experiences (M.J. Moore et al., 2023). By ensuring these individuals have access to comprehensive behavioral health programs, SB 277 helps mitigate barriers to care and provides the necessary support for their well-being.

The integration of behavioral health services also highlights Maryland's recognition of the importance of proactive mental health. This prioritization acknowledges that mental health is just as important for physical health, especially for individuals and their families who have endured the stress and sacrifice of military and uniformed service. In addition, by standardizing terms related to "veteran" and "uniformed services", the bill promotes consistency and clarity in the application of laws affecting service members and their families. This uniformity is essential in eliminating confusion and inconsistencies that can contribute to unequal treatment or denial of benefits to those who have honorably served.

The Maryland Rural Health Association believes in behavioral health care that is accessible and comprehensive. We believe that Senate Bill 277 is important to support the veterans, uniformed services members, and their families that call rural Maryland home. We urge the Committee to support SB277.

*On behalf of the Maryland Rural Health Association,
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Moore, M.J., Shawler E, Jordan CH, et al. (2023). Veteran and Military Mental Health Issues. In: StatPeals [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK572092/>

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Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families. (n.d.). Landing Zone Maryland. <https://veterans.maryland.gov/landing-zone-maryland/#:~:text=The%20Maryland%20Department%20of%20Veterans,%2C%20National%20Guard%2C%20and%20dependents>.