

SFC MATTHEW FAST TESTIMONY

Testimony of Evelyn L. Lewis, MD, MA, FAAFP, DABDA

In Support of SB 740 – SFC Matthew Fast Act for Warrior Healthcare

Before the Maryland General Assembly

Date: March 4th, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee, my name is Dr. Evelyn L. Lewis, a family physician who has spent 25 years caring for those who serve our nation. I continue this mission as the President and Chair of the Veterans Health and Wellness Foundation.

I strongly and unconditionally support the SFC Matthew Fast Act for Warrior Health, a life-saving measure to close dangerous healthcare gaps for Maryland's 1.3 million Warriors.

The statistics are stark:

- **PTSD rates are 115% higher in Veterans**
- **Chronic pain, cardiovascular disease, and hearing impairment are 32%, 39%, and 380% higher, respectively.**

Despite these risks, healthcare providers often fail to ask one crucial question: "Have you served?" Without this information, vital diagnoses are missed, treatments are ineffective, and preventable health crises occur. Our current healthcare system is failing our warriors. Despite Maryland's abundant resources, over 80% receive care in commercial facilities, where providers are often untrained in military health. A 2023 study found that while 71% of providers agree it's important to ask about military service, only 19% actually do.

The SFC Matthew Fast Act solves this by mandating universal screening for military service in all Maryland-licensed healthcare facilities, ensuring that Veterans are recognized as a vulnerable population. It also requires annual reporting on Warrior health disparities.

I have witnessed and personally experienced the struggles Veterans face when their military history is overlooked. This commonsense, cost-effective solution improves patient outcomes and fulfill America's promise "to care for those who have borne the battle."

Maryland has both the resources and the moral imperative to ensure "excellence" in care for our military community. I urge you to support the SFC Matthew Fast Act and help build a healthcare system that truly serves those who have sacrificed so much for our country.

Thank you.