



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

January 21, 2025

The Honorable Pamela Beidle
Chair, Finance Committee
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Subject: Request for **FAVORABLE report with Amendments** – SB0277 – Health Equality for Service Members Act

Dear Chair Beidle and distinguished members of the Finance Committee:

On behalf of the members of the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report with Amendments** by the Committee on **SB0277 – Health Equality for Service Members Act**, sponsored by Senator Bryan Simonaire. The bill will update and change the application of certain provisions of law governing public health, the regulation of health occupations, and housing vouchers and assistance to apply to all uniformed services rather than only the armed forces. It will more closely align Maryland Code with U.S. Code. Our recommendation of a FAVORABLE report with Amendment, however, is based on the definition of “veteran” being proposed in the bill compared with that in § 1-117, Veteran, of the State Government Article of the Maryland Code.

General Provisions § 1-117 defines a veteran as individual “eligible under 38 U.S. Code § 101, a member of the commissioned corps of: (1) the Public Health Service; or (2) the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey.” The language that is proposed in Article – State Government § 9-901 (M) uses the definition of “veteran” found in 38 U.S. Code § 101, which states that the “term ‘veteran’ means a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.” As such, **38 U.S. Code § 101 excludes the commissioned corps of both the Public Health Service (PHS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and is contrary to the definition in General Provisions § 1-117.** The MMC believes the adoption of this language eliminates as veterans those who served honorably with PHS and NOAA. **We respectfully request that language be amended to read that “veteran has the meaning stated in § 1-117 of the General Provisions Article.**

The specific instances where these amendments should be made are as follows:

- Page 4, lines 11-16: restore the deleted text in § 1-117 and delete the reference to 38 U.S. Code § 101.
- Page 24, lines 5-8: amend the language to read that “veteran has the meaning stated in § 1-117 of the General Provisions Article.

The Maryland Military Coalition **strongly supports SB0277** and asks for a FAVORABLE report with Amendments as noted above. Updating and implementing the proposed changes will make the Maryland Code consistent with the U.S. Code for key terms related to the uniformed services and will decrease their misuse in future legislation and policymaking.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of 22 prominent Maryland-based veteran and military groups, representing over 150,000 service-connected individuals, including those currently serving, veterans, retirees and their families, caregivers and survivors. Visit our website at <https://mdmilcoalition.org/>.

We want to thank Senator Simonaire for sponsoring this legislation and his support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,



David L. Dragics
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Legislative Director