

## **Testimony of Ronald Steptoe**

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

Before the **Maryland General Assembly**

**Date: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Chairperson, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,**

Thank you for this opportunity, and a special thanks to **Jessica Fast** for her courage in sharing **SFC Matthew Fast's** story. No warrior should ever be failed by the system and community they served.

I'm **Ronald Steptoe**, a **34-year Maryland resident, veteran, and West Point graduate**, along with my wife. My family's legacy of military service dates back 8 generations to the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. For the past **17 years**, I've worked to address **military and veteran health disparities**, particularly those linked to **toxic exposures**. In my work as a Principal Investigator and Innovator in partnership with the **Department of Defense R&D programs**, I've collaborated with **Walter Reed** and the **Air Force's 59th Medical Wing**.

Here's the reality:

- **80% of veterans** and almost all National Guard and Reserve members and their families get care in **civilian hospitals and outpatient facilities**.
- **Only 57% of hospitals ask about military service.**
- **Only 10% do anything with that information.**

With the **PACT Act of 2022**, **toxic exposure risks** are finally **recognized**—but that means nothing if **hospitals and outpatient facilities don't ask the right questions**.

This issue is personal.

At **57**, I was diagnosed with **Stage 2 prostate cancer**—a disease usually found at **67**. My **primary care doctor at LifeBridge**, my **urologist at Chesapeake Urology**, the **chief of urology at Johns Hopkins Howard County Hospital**, and my **surgeon at MedStar** all

recognized my **higher risk as an African American male**. But **none recognized my veteran status—because it wasn't in my medical record at any of these healthcare organizations**.

Here's why that matters:

- **1 in 8 men** will develop prostate cancer.
- **1 in 6 African American men** will develop it.
- **1 in 5 veterans** will develop it.

I had to tell **each doctor** about my risk as a veteran. **How many veterans don't know to do that?**

Recently, a Maryland health system executive told me that the Warrior Community, which includes the National Guard, Reserves, Active-Duty, Veterans, and their families, will not be a strategic priority at-risk population for the health system over the next 2 to 5 years.

**That's unacceptable.**

As a **professional and citizen**, I know this bill is necessary and critical to public safety and national security.

As a **veteran**, I **beg** you to pass it.

As a **cancer patient**, I plead with you for **action**.

**Our warriors don't have time to wait.**

Thank you.

Ronald J. Steptoe, *CMR, DABDA*

*Board Certified Diplomate of the*

*American Board of Disability Analyst*