

SB 277 Testimony.pdf

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Position: FAV



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,
Jonathan Dayton, MS, NREMT, CNE, Executive Director
jdayton@mdruralhealth.org*

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/>

P.O. Box 3128 • LaVale, Maryland 21504



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>.

SB 277 Hugh McClean_UMB School of Law_Letter of Su

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



School of Law
The Bob Parsons Veterans
Advocacy Clinic

1420 N. Charles St.
Baltimore, MD 21201-5779

T: 410.837.5706
F: 410.837.4776
law.ubalt.edu

January 23, 2025

Finance Committee
Miller Senate Office Building
11 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD

Re: Letter in Support of Senate Bill 277

Dear Honorable Committee Members,

I respectfully submit this letter in support of Senate Bill (“SB”) 277, the Health Equality for Service Members Act. I am an Associate Professor and Director of the Bob Parsons Veterans Advocacy Clinic at the University of Baltimore School of Law. I founded the clinic in 2014, and I have supervised student-attorneys in the representation of veterans in a wide variety of litigation and legislative initiatives for the last ten years. Prior to joining the faculty, I served in the U.S. Air Force Judge Advocate General Corps from 2003 to 2014, and was on the faculty at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado.

I fully support the interpretations and definitions outlined in SB 277. The bill clearly defines military terms that are important in the designation of certain benefits. The bill removes previous ambiguity in military terminology. Where appropriate, the bill incorporates definitions from the U.S. Code, thereby maintaining continuity between military terminology in state and federal law.

For the above reasons, I fully endorse SB 277. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions at hmclean@ubalt.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Hugh McClean'.

Hugh McClean

SB 277 Senator Simonaire_FAV.pdf

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV

BRYAN W. SIMONAIRE
Legislative District 31
Anne Arundel County

Education, Energy, and the
Environment Committee

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area



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11 Bladen Street, Room 320
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The Senate of Maryland

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

SB 277 - "Health Equality for Servicemembers Act"

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 277.

I am very excited to be presenting a package of bills that represents the most comprehensive overhaul of military law in our state's modern history.

The package consists of 8 bills:

At the core is SB 275 - Modernization of Military Laws Act

Along with 7 other bills covering all of Maryland Laws

I have worked directly with the Uniformed Services, military advocates, federal and state agencies, military legal experts and our DLS legal counsel to draft a consensus and workable solution.

This being the first bill hearing of the package I wanted to give you an overview of what the package does:

1. **Completely restructures** Maryland's military law into the 21st century with modernized and standardized terms that are also strategically centralized in one location
2. **Establishes consistent and equal benefits** among all 8 Uniformed Services branches and reserve units, and
3. **Authorizes the Department of Veterans and Military Families** to provide support to our service members, in addition to our veterans.

The advantages are namely:

1. Updates current laws to **provide over 100 additional benefits** that were being denied to various former and current service members simply because of inconsistent and outdated terminology.
2. **Creates a centralized structure** that facilitates easy, consistent and standard military laws for future revisions.
3. **Codifies the Department's authority and duty** to support the service members.

To get an **idea of the magnitude** of this package, every legislator received a memo this past November from the Department of Veterans and Military Families highlighting 34 sections in our laws with inconsistencies in military terminology.

In contrast, this comprehensive legislative package updates more than 230 sections with over 500 revisions touching nearly every article.

But first a brief refresher on terms so my presentation makes sense:

The term '**Uniformed Services**' is comprised of 8 federal branches.

There are **6 military** branches of the Uniformed Services (~ 1.3 million active duty):

Referred to as the '**Armed forces**':

Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy and Space Force

There are **2 non-military** branches of the Uniformed Services (~6,000 active duty nationwide)

- Commissioned Corps Officers of the Public Health Services (PHS)
- Commissioned Corps Officers of the National Oceanic Atmospheric and Administration (NOAA)

I am sure we are all familiar with what our military branches do, but some may not realize what the other non-military branches do to protect our nation.

I won't discuss all PHS and NOAA responsibilities, but I will highlight a few tasks.

PHS sent hundreds of officers over to Afghanistan to assist during the war. Additionally, they were sent over to Africa to help when there was an Ebola outbreak to contain it.

NOAA is involved in almost every mission performed by our military through its coordination of their satellites and weather capabilities. Additionally, you may not know that NOAA was in the Gulf helping sweep for mines during the war.

And that brings me to SB 277. which updates the Health Articles primarily.

The Health General Articles updates extend current benefits to all our service members, such as:

1. No fee collected for birth certificates,
2. Recording all veterans admitted to hospitals,
3. Consideration for relocation to our state or temporary deployment out of our state,
4. Making behavioral health services available, and
5. Providing access to PTSD treatments for all service members.

A recent study showed how Commissioned Corps Officers of PHS are dealing with PTSD in their stressful line of work across the world.

The other section of this bill dealing with the Health Occupations Article simply updates the 'Servicemember' definition to refer to the US Code's 'uniformed service' definition opposed to just the 'armed forces' and aligns with Federal law and thereby include all branches of the uniformed services of the United States.

The Health Occupations Article provisions updated in this Article all apply to 6 of the 8 Unformed Service branches. This bill updates these current provisions to all 8 of our service members, such as:

1. Revising terminology so all service member spouses are treated equally,
2. Board to consider giving credits for training and education received in the Uniformed Services,
3. Board to give consideration during renewal of license when service member deployed overseas,
4. Providing the Health Occupation Board with information on culture in the Uniformed Services, and
5. Waive the optometry examination if certain standards met for all service members.

Lastly, I would note that in general, these bills are **not changing the underlying policy but providing equality among our service members**. And worked very hard to keep the **fiscal note to zero** or within all the Department's current budget.

I could go into much greater depth but will stop there and say, "For all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration."

SB 277_SenSimonaire

Uploaded by: Kara Contino

Position: FAV



Maryland Military Law Package



Most Comprehensive Overhaul in Modern History

- Over 500 References
- Over 200 Statutes
- Nearly every Article

- Veterans
- Service members
- Reserves
- National Guard



Bi-Partisan Legislative Package



8 Bill Legislative Package

SB 275 Modernization of Military Laws Act

SB 278 Tax Relief & Pensions Equality

SB 279 Business & Insurance Equality

SB 281 Transportation Equality

for
Service
Members Act

SB 277 Health Equality

SB 280 Judicial & Public Safety Equality

SB 282 Recreational Equality

SB 276 Educational Equality

The Problem: Inconsistent Definitions

Different Definitions
Throughout our Articles
Example: “**Service Member**”

Health

Education

Labor &
Employment

Commercial
Law

Financial
Institutions

Tax –
Property

Public
Safety

The Problem: Undefined Terms

Undefined and Inconsistent Terms
Throughout our Articles

Veteran

Reserve Component

Armed Forces

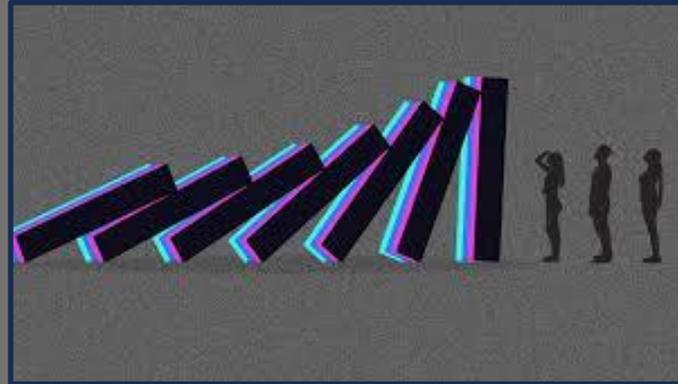


Service Member

Active Duty

Military Families

The Problem: Inconsistent and Undefined Terms



Negative Outcomes

1. Inconsistent Laws Create Confusion
2. Inconsistent Benefits Provided to our Service Members
3. A Nightmare to Update Military terms
4. Keeps Maryland Out-of-Sync with Federal Agencies



SB 275 - Modernization of Military Laws



1. Completely Restructures our Laws
into 21st Century

2. Equal Treatment for all Service Members

3. Authorizes Dept to Support Service Members

Benefits

- Equal Access to Benefits & Services
- Consistent Treatment for All Members
- Easy Revisions to Future Laws
- Simplify Interaction with Federal Agencies



21st Century Maryland Military Laws



Varying
Definitions

Standardization

- Consistent Terminology and Laws
- Align with many Federal Definitions

Base Federal Definitions
Embrace Dept 's Goals

Local
Definitions

Centralization

- Terminology Centralized in One Section
- All Articles Reference One Section

1 Centralized Location
Easy Future Revisions

Military ID
Military Reserves

Modernization

- Incorporate 21st Century Terminology
- Include All Branches & Reserve Units

Uniformed Services ID
Reserve Components

UNIFORMED SERVICES

Consist of 8 Branches

6 Military Branches

2 Non-Military Branches

ARMED FORCES

AIR FORCE
ARMY
COAST GUARD
MARINES
NAVY
SPACE FORCE

~ 1.3 MILLION ACTIVE DUTY

RESERVES

AIR FORCE
ARMY
MARINES
NAVY
AIR NATIONAL
GUARD
ARMY NATIONAL
GUARD

PHS

COMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS

(HQ in Bethesda)

~ 5,300 ACTIVE DUTY

~ 1000 IN MARYLAND

RESERVES

PHS READY
RESERVE

NOAA

COMMISSIONED OFFICER CORPS

(HQ in Silver Springs)

~ 330 ACTIVE DUTY

~ 85 IN MARYLAND

PHS – United States Public Health Services

NOAA – National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration

PHS & NOAA

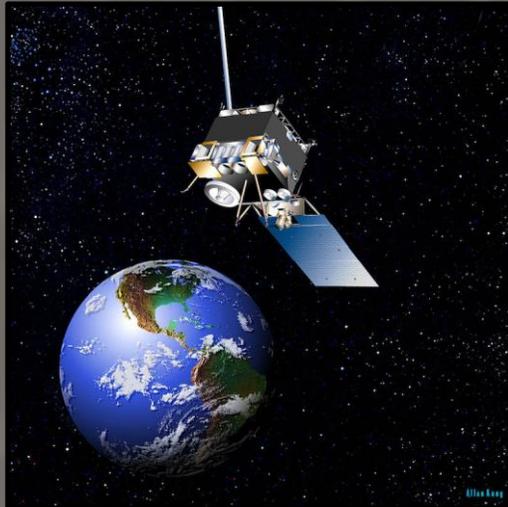
Serves & Protects our Nation



NOAA – Supported mine sweeping in Gulf.



PHS – Deployed 100s to Iraq & Afghanistan conflict.



NOAA – Coordinates weather satellite data with military operations



PHS – Deployed to Africa fighting Ebola



COMMISSIONED CORPS
OF THE U.S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

About Us

Career Fields

Recruitment Questions

NOV

All 8 Branches Protect our County...

... All 8 Branches Deserve
Equal Respect & Treatment!





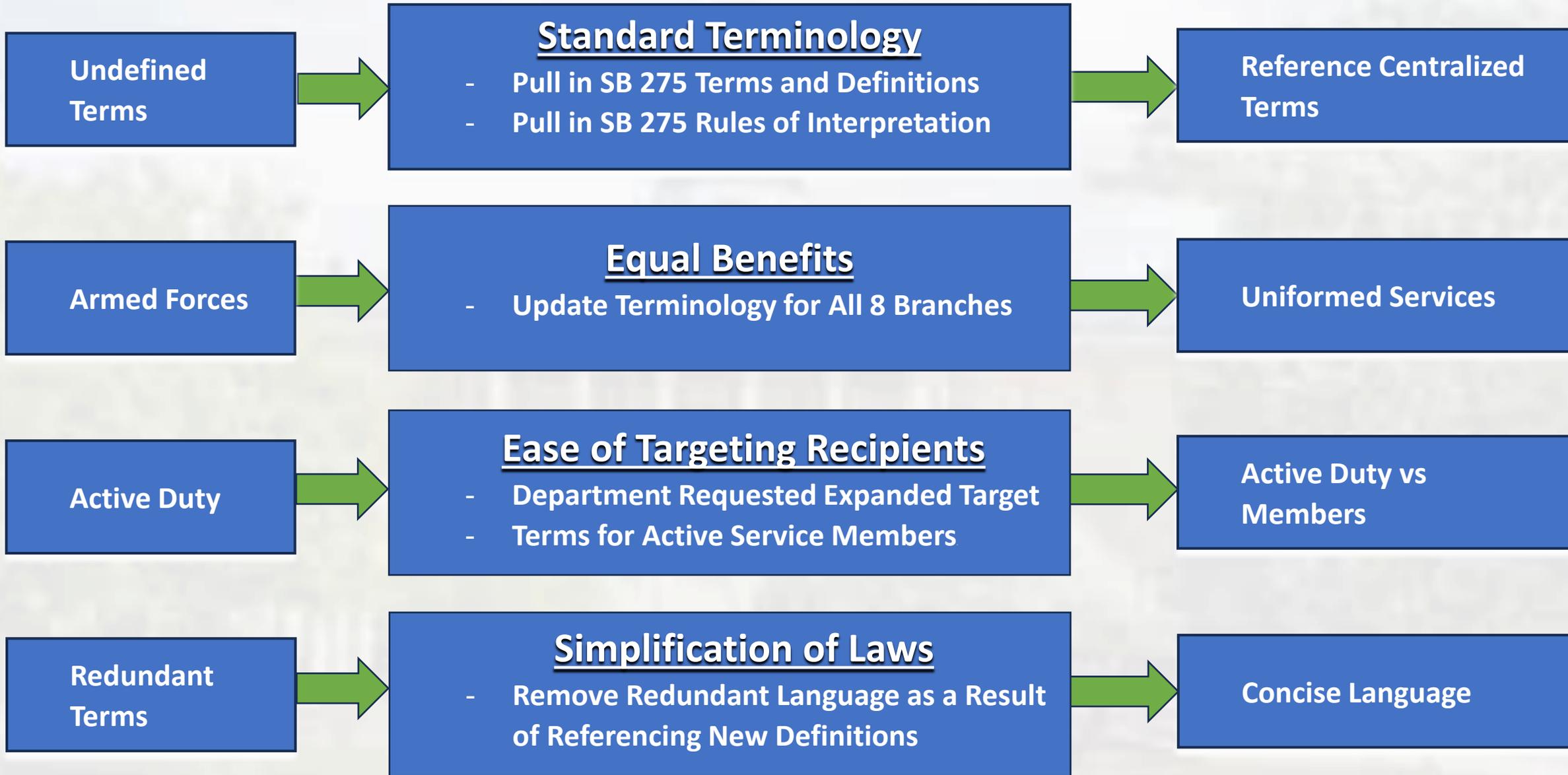
COLLABORATION

Collaboration and Amendments

- Worked with 12 State Departments
- Worked with Uniformed Services Branches
- Worked with Military Advocacy Groups
- Worked with Military Legal Experts
- Worked with Numerous Stakeholders
 - Worked extensively with DLS
- Amendments – A Few Tweaks to align with goals of Department



SB 277 – Health Equality for Service Members Act





SB 277 – Health Equality for Service Members Act



Maryland a Model for Other States!

Ask for Favorable Consideration!



SB 277 – Health Equality for Service Members Act



Support Material



38 USC 101



(2) The term "**veteran**" means a person who served in the **active military, naval, air, or space service**, and who was discharged or released there from under conditions other than dishonorable

(24) The term "**active military, naval, air, or space service**" includes-

(A) **active duty**

(B) any period of active duty for training during which the individual concerned was disabled or died from a disease or injury incurred or aggravated in line of duty; and

(C) any period of inactive duty training during which the individual concerned was disabled or died-

(i) from an injury incurred or aggravated in line of duty; or

(ii) from an acute myocardial infarction, a cardiac arrest, or a cerebrovascular accident occurring during such training.

(21) The term "**active duty**" means-

(A) full-time duty in the **Armed Forces**, other than active duty for training;

(B) full-time duty (other than for training purposes) as a commissioned officer of the **Regular or Reserve Corps** of the **Public Health Service** (i) on or after July 29, 1945, or (ii) before that date under circumstances affording entitlement to "full military benefits" or (iii) at any time, for the purposes of chapter 13 of this title;

(C) full-time duty as a commissioned officer in the commissioned officer corps of the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** or its predecessor organization the Coast and Geodetic Survey (i) on or after July 29, 1945, or (ii) before that date (I) while on transfer to one of the Armed Forces, or (II) while, in time of war or national emergency declared by the President, assigned to duty on a project for one of the Armed Forces in an area determined by the Secretary of Defense to be of immediate military hazard, or (III) in the Philippine Islands on December 7, 1941, and continuously in such islands thereafter, or (iii) at any time, for the purposes of chapter 13 of this title;

(D) service as a cadet at the United States Military, Air Force, or Coast Guard Academy, or as a midshipman at the United States Naval Academy; and

(E) authorized travel to or from such duty or service.



General Provisions & State Govt Article



General Provisions 1-117

With respect to any State program of benefits, rights, or privileges applicable to a veteran under this Code, “veteran” includes, ~~if the individual is eligible under 38 U.S.C. § 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.~~

AN INDIVIDUAL WHO MEETS THE DEFINITION OF “VETERAN” UNDER § 9-901 OF THE STATE GOVERNMENT ARTICLE.

State Govt 9-901

(f) Except as otherwise provided ~~[in this subtitle]~~, “veteran” means an individual who served on active duty in the ~~[armed forces of the United States]~~, **UNIFORMED SERVICES** other than for training, and was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable.

State Govt 9-901

(L) **UNIFORMED SERVICES** HAS THE MEANING STATED IN 37 U.S.C. § 101

37 USC 101:

(3) The term “uniformed services” means the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, Coast Guard, **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**, and **Public Health Service**.

SB277_VeteransCaucus_FAV

Uploaded by: Veterans Caucus

Position: FAV



MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VETERANS CAUCUS

January 27, 2025

Senator Pamela Beidle, Chair
Finance
3E Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: SB277, Health Equality for Service Members Act
Hearing Date: January 28, 2025

Dear Chairwoman, Beidle,

Please let this letter serve as notice of the support of the Maryland General Assembly Senate Veterans Caucus for Senate Bill 277.

After review by our respective legislative committee, the Senate Veterans Caucus believes that the above-mentioned legislation would provide a valuable benefit to the veterans of the State of Maryland and requests a favorable report.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Benjamin F. Brooks".

Senator Benjamin Brooks
Senate Chair

cc: Senator Bryan Simonaire

Maryland Military Coalition SB0277 Written Testimo

Uploaded by: DAVID Dragics

Position: FWA



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
COL (Ret), U.S. Army
Legislative Director

SB 277 - MBON - FIN - LOSWA.pdf

Uploaded by: State of Maryland

Position: FWA



Board of Nursing

Wes Moore, Governor · Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor · Laura Herrera Scott, M.D., M.P.H., Secretary

January 28th, 2025

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

RE: SB 277 – Health Equality for Service Members Act

Dear Chair Beidle and Committee Members:

The Maryland Board of Nursing (the Board) respectfully submits this letter of support w/ amendments for SB 277 Health Equality for Service Members Act.

This bill establishes rules of interpretation related to the uniformed services; alters the rule of interpretation for "veteran"; and alters 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.

The Board supports the bill's intentions in supporting veterans, and offers amendments to align the statutory changes made to the Health Occupations chapter as it refers to professions under the Boards jurisdiction. Specifically, the bill alters language in the electrology section, and the amendments we are putting forward would make identical the relevant sections referring to Registered Nurses, Nursing Assistants and Dialysis Technicians, Medication Technicians, Licensed Direct-Entry Midwives, and Licensed Certified Midwives.

Amendment to Senate Bill 277

On page 18 line 14 add

8-316 (a)(3)

Is disciplined by a licensing[, military,] or disciplinary authority [in this] **OF ANY** State [or in any other state] or country, [or] convicted or disciplined by a court [in this] **OF ANY** State [or in any other state] or country, **OR DISCIPLINED BY AND BRANCH OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES OR THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION** for an act that would be grounds for disciplinary action under the Board's disciplinary statutes;

8-6A-10(a)(3)

Is disciplined by a licensing[, military,] or disciplinary authority [in this] **OF ANY** State [or in any other state] or country, [or] convicted or disciplined by a court [in this] **OF ANY**

State [or in any other state] or country, **OR DISCIPLINED BY AND BRANCH OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES OR THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION** for an act that would be grounds for disciplinary action under the Board's disciplinary statutes;

On page 18 line 23

8-6c-20(a)(3)

Is disciplined by a licensing[, military,] or disciplinary authority [in this State or in any other state or country], **OF ANY STATE OR COUNTRY**, convicted or disciplined by a court [in this State or in any other state or country] **OF ANY STATE OR COUNTRY**, or disciplined by [a branch of the United States] **ANY BRANCH OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES OR THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION** for an act that would be grounds for disciplinary action under the Board's disciplinary statutes;

8-6d-10(a)(3)

Is disciplined by a licensing[, military,] or disciplinary authority [in this State or in any other state or country], **OF ANY STATE OR COUNTRY**, convicted or disciplined by a court [in this State or in any other state or country] **OF ANY STATE OR COUNTRY**, or disciplined by [a branch of the United States] **ANY BRANCH OF THE UNIFORMED SERVICES OR THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION** for an act that would be grounds for disciplinary action under the Board's disciplinary statutes;

Thank you again for your time. For more information, please contact Ms. Mitzi Fishman, Director of Legislative Affairs, at 410-585-2049 or mitzi.fishman@maryland.gov, or Ms. Rhonda Scott, Executive Director, at 410-585-1953 or rhonda.scott2@maryland.gov.

Sincerely,



Christine Lechliter
Board President

The opinion of the Board expressed in this document does not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.