

Thursday, March 27, 2025

TESTIMONY ON SB0740 - POSITION FAVORABLE
SFC Matthew Fast Act for Warrior Healthcare

TO: Chair Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and esteemed members of the Health and Government Operations Committee

FROM: Jessica Fast (Sykesville, Maryland 21784)

Good afternoon, Chair Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and esteemed members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for welcoming me here today. I'm humbled to stand before you, carrying both the memory of my late husband, SFC Matthew "Matt" Fast, and the hope that together we can protect other families from the heartbreak mine has endured.

I also want to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Senator Folden for his leadership on this bill on behalf of the Warrior Community, as well as Senators Beidle, Ellis, Gile, Lam, Mautz, Ready, and Washington for your support.

I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 0740, the SFC Matthew Fast Act. Matt was just twenty-nine when he passed away suddenly and unexpectedly at home. He was strong, kindhearted, and honorable, fueled by an unshakable duty to his beloved Maryland and to this nation.

What we believed to be a passing illness turned out to be far more serious. After a few days of "heaviness" in his chest, we went to an urgent care where he was tested for strep throat. When that test came back negative, he was sent home and advised to rest. Three days later, he was gone—taken by an undetected heart condition that might have been caught if only our providers had been equipped to recognize the unique health risks of his military service.

A week after he passed, I learned I was pregnant with our son, Matthew II. He will know his father only through photos, videos, and cherished memories. One simple question—"Have you served?"—can spare other families this devastation. What if providers had known to ask about Matt's exposure to burn pits or other hazards? How many families might remain whole if civilian healthcare systems had a standardized way to identify, screen, and treat those who have served?

That's why I began looking for ways to ensure others would not suffer the same fate, which has led me here. More than 500,000 Marylanders—Veterans, Active Duty Service Members Reservists, National Guard members, and their families—comprise our Warrior

Community, most of which, like my husband, receive their healthcare outside of the VA. Because providers often aren't aware they're treating a former service member, they miss critical opportunities to diagnose and address service-connected risks.

The SFC Matthew Fast Act takes a crucial step toward helping our healthcare system better identify and care for these patients without imposing an undue burden on the state budget. By designating the Warrior Community as a vulnerable population, we align with existing community benefit and accreditation requirements while making a genuine difference in how we screen, diagnose, and treat chronic conditions that disproportionately affect veterans—heart disease, stroke, cancer, and more.

Had these standards been in place when Matt sought treatment, I firmly believe his doctors would have seen the full picture—his deployments, his exposures, and his risks—and could have intervened in time. That, at its core, is why this bill matters: it's a practical, life-saving measure that honors every individual who has served.

Today, I stand before you with hope and determination that we can honor my husband's memory—and the service of countless others—by ensuring no Warrior in Maryland slips through the cracks of civilian healthcare. I refuse to let Matt's story end in tragedy when it could spark life-saving change for so many others. I respectfully urge this committee to vote in support of SB0740, and help us protect the health and future of those who have given so much.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jessica E. Fast

The Story of Matt Fast: Demand Better Healthcare for Warriors [VIDEO]



The Story of Matt Fast: Demand Better Healthcare for Warriors

View Video: <https://youtu.be/1YXuzPcCnIQ?si=FrGPJUp5dMAvbXdK>