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## **Defend the Guard Act**

Good afternoon, Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the Health and Government Operations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 548, the "Defend the Guard" Act.

The Maryland National Guard plays a critical role in both state emergencies and our national defense at home and overseas. Since 9/11, the federal government has invested heavily in the National Guard—enhancing personnel readiness, modernizing equipment, and improving infrastructure. These investments by the Department of Defense are based on the expectation that National Guard units remain available to support our nation's national security needs.

Restricting the Maryland National Guard's participation in federal missions could jeopardize this funding, shifting resources and modernization efforts to states that remain fully engaged.

Beyond the financial impact, this bill challenges the fundamental role of the National Guard as a dual-mission force. Maryland National Guard Soldiers and Airmen voluntarily serve both state and federal missions. Many actively seek federal deployments to gain valuable experience, career advancement, and active-duty service time. Under HB 548, these opportunities would be restricted, even though federal law allows for voluntary activation with both service member and gubernatorial consent.

Additionally, the Department of Defense determines force structure and resource allocation based on the full availability of National Guard units nationwide. If the Maryland National Guard withdraws from federal operations, our units risk losing priority in training, equipment upgrades, and overall readiness.

This could weaken our ability to respond effectively to state emergencies, natural disasters, and other crises that require a well-trained force.

HB 548 would not only limit opportunities for our service members but also risk diminishing Maryland's National Guard capabilities. For these reasons, we urge the committee to issue an unfavorable report. Thank you for your time and consideration.