



**Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families
Office of the Secretary**

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GOVERNOR

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ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY

**House Bill 142 - State Government - Veterans and Military Families Ombudsman - Establishment
OPPOSE**

January 17, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
Room 241, House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Peña-Melnyk and Committee Members,

The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) is committed to leading veterans and their families through life's transitions, making Maryland the best state for the military-connected communities. DVMF fulfills its mission through five core programs: the Service and Benefits Program, which helps veterans access federal, state, and local earned benefits; Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, offering assisted living and skilled nursing care; the Cemetery and Memorial Program, providing dignified resting places and maintaining memorials honoring Maryland's veterans; the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program, fostering connection and awareness; and the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund, offering financial assistance to veterans and their families in need. These programs reflect Maryland's commitment to honoring and empowering its military-connected community.

Although the department opposes HB142, we appreciate Del. Miller and Sen. Salling's intention was to establish an ombudsman within our department to serve as a resource for veterans, this proposed role duplicates functions that DVMF already fulfills through its established Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program (COA) and the Constituent Services Program.

The Constituent Services Program is a vital resource for veterans, service members, and their families, offering comprehensive assistance in navigating benefits and addressing critical needs. In the past year alone, the program has successfully resolved 739 cases encompassing issues such as obtaining DD214 records, coordinating appointments with service offices, providing emergency financial assistance, addressing housing insecurity, and accessing state veterans' benefits. Nearly 70% of inquiries come directly from veterans, while 20% originate from their family members, underscoring the program's broad reach and effectiveness. Moreover, the program's most common assistance requests-accessing VA benefits and financial support-align closely with the proposed duties of the ombudsman.

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Establishing a separate ombudsman role would not only create redundancy but could lead to confusion for constituents about where to seek assistance. Additionally, the associated administrative and operational costs would divert resources from existing programs that already deliver results.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. I urge the committee to oppose House Bill 142.

Sincerely,

Anthony C. Woods
Secretary