



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

Statement of CAPT Lynn Nash
HB 138 – Burial Equity Act
January 21, 2025

FAVORABLE With Amendment

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk and Members of the House Government and Operations Committee

For the record, my name is Lynn Nash. I am a 30 year retiree with service in both the Army and the U.S. Public Health Service and the Communications Director for the Coalition.

I'm pleased to say that I am starting out in front of your committee this session with a bill that has no cost. Let's hope that I can keep it up.

House Bill HB 138, the Burial Equity Act, is a valuable measure. The bill seeks to clarify existing eligibility for burial in State cemeteries for members of the National Guard and Military Reserves. However, the current bill language is exclusive and needs amendment.

The Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMF) follows the eligibility requirements of the VA National Cemetery. This legislation clarifies that members who served full-time in the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service or the Commissioned Corps of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrations are veterans, as stated in Maryland Code, General Provisions § 1-117 and Title 38 U.S. Code § 101.

Further, the bill includes service members who have completed their contractual obligations as a member of the National Guard or the "**Military Reserves**" (emphasis added) under honorable terms. As written, the bill is exclusive. The use of the term "military reserves" includes only members of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Space Force. It excludes members of the Coast Guard (Department of Homeland Security) and the Ready Reserve of the U.S. Public Health Service (Department of Health and Human Services) who are federal reservists. To exclude these reservists who volunteer and place their lives on the line daily, does a huge disservice to them and their family members.

The Coalition seeks an amendment to correct this disservice. Instead of using the term "**military reserves**", we ask that bill be modified to "**federal reserve**" which includes the reserves of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Space Force, as well as the **Coast Guard and the Ready Reserve of the Commissioned Corps of the U.S. Public Health Service**". This language keeps in the spirit of the Governor's "leave no man behind" and conforms to the DVMF-preferred use of the term "Uniformed Services". We have coordinated with both and have reached agreement.

This bill has no fiscal consequence. Veterans and their spouses and dependents are currently not charged for burial. This legislation continues the practice of collecting a burial fee for National Guard and Reservists equal to the annual plot allowance established by the National Cemetery Administration. That fee currently is \$948.00.

We support the intent of HB 767 and ask for a FAVORABLE report with amendment to truly create the Burial Equity Act, by including both the National Guard and ALL federal reservists.

The Maryland Military Coalition is a registered non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization comprised of 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.

We want to thank the Department of Veterans and Military Families and Governor Moor for their on-going support of ALL of the uniformed services community in Maryland.