



MARYLAND MILITARY COALITION

Serving Veterans through Legislative Advocacy

January 21, 2025

The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk
The Honorable Bonnie Cullison
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
241 Taylor House Office Building
6 Bladen Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison and Distinguished Members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee:

House Bill HB 138, "State Government – Veterans – Burial at State Veterans' Cemeteries (Burial Equity Act)", is a valuable measure. This no-cost legislation, sponsored by the Department of Veterans and Military Families and Governor Moore, 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 Administration 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. The use of the term "military reserves" includes only members of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force and Space Force **and 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** reserves. To exclude these reservists who volunteer and place their lives on the line daily, does a huge **diservice** to them and their family members.

The Coalition seeks an amendment to correct this diservice, and offers the following language. "...obligation of service as a member of ~~military~~ ***federal reserves of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Space Force, 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, who agree with this amendment.

As previously stated, this bill has no fiscal consequence. Veterans and their spouses and dependents are currently not charged for burial. This legislation continues the practice of

1101 Mercantile Lane, Suite 260 • Largo, Maryland 20774
(301) 583-8687 • (800) 808-4517

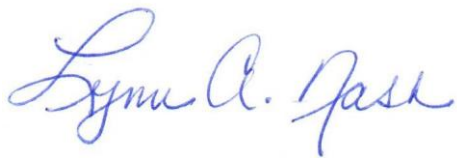
collecting a burial fee for National Guard and Reservists equal to the annual plot allowance established by the National Cemetery Administration. That fee currently is \$948.00.

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 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.

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.

Respectfully,



Lynn A. Nash
CAPT (R), U.S. Public Health Service
Communications Director

1 Attachment – Member Organizations of the Maryland Military Coalition

Member Organizations of the Maryland Military Coalition

Air Force Sergeants Association

American Military Society

American Minority Veterans Research Project

Association of the United States Navy

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

Disabled American Veterans

Fleet Reserve Association of Annapolis

Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A

Maryland Air National Guard Retirees' Association

Maryland Veterans Chamber of Commerce

Military Officers Association of America

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Military Order of the World Wars

Montford Point Marines of America

National Association of Black Veterans

National Association of Retired Federal Employees, Military Veterans

Naval Enlisted Reserve Association

NOAA Association of Commissioned Officers

Platoon 22

Reserve Organization of America

Society of Military Widows

Veterans of Foreign Wars