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**HB142 State Government – Veterans and Military Families Ombudsman -Establishment**  
**FAVORABLE**  
**Health and Government Operations Committee**  
**January 21, 2025**

Good afternoon, Madam Chair Pena-Melnyk and members of the House Health and Government Operations Committee. My name is Jim Campbell, President Emeritus for AARP Maryland, and a former Maryland State Delegate. AARP Maryland, representing 850,000 members, is supporting HB 142 sponsored by Delegate Miller.

HB142 establishes the office of Ombudsman for Veterans and Military Families within the Department of Veterans and Military Families. The Ombudsman will provide information on the benefits and services available to veterans and their families. Among other responsibilities, this office would be a trusted source to advise members of the military on the application process for benefits.

**WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?**

According to the Veterans Administration website, more veterans are getting Veterans Administration healthcare and benefits than ever before. Unfortunately, this has led to a rise in the number of “shady individuals and companies”—not accredited by the Veterans Administration—who are offering claims assistance and charging hefty fees for their efforts. These companies are also misleading veterans to think it’s OK to exaggerate disability symptoms to get higher benefits.

The Veterans Administration says that veterans should never pay to file an initial claim for benefits unless it’s through a Veterans Administration accredited attorney, claims agent, or Veterans Service Organization representative. Connecting members of the military and the benefits due them is one of AARP’s four priority goals. The other three are caregiving, fighting fraud, and helping with career and employment opportunities through Veteran and Military Spouses Job Center. AARP’s nationwide membership includes more than six million individuals with current or former military service.

HB142 would provide a distinct trusted source for veterans and their families to learn about the benefit application process and other services available to them. For these reasons, AARP Maryland respectfully asks the Committee for a favorable report on 142. Please contact Tammy Bresnahan at [tbresnahan@aarp.org](mailto:tbresnahan@aarp.org). or by calling 410-302-8451 with any questions.