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Education, Energy, and the
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Joint Committee on the Chesapeake and
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The Senate of Maryland
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SB 280 - " Judiciary & Public Safety Equality for Servicemembers Act "

I am Senator Bryan Simonaire presenting SB 280.

I am very excited to be presenting a package of bills that represents the most comprehensive overhaul of military law in our state's modern history.

The package consists of 8 bills:

At the core is SB 275 - Modernization of Military Laws Act

Along with 7 other bills covering all of Maryland Laws

I have worked directly with the Uniformed Services, military advocates, federal and state agencies, military legal experts and our DLS legal counsel to draft a consensus and workable solution.

This being the first bill hearing of the package I wanted to give you an overview of what the package does:

1. Completely restructures Maryland's military law into the 21st century with modernized and standardized terms that are also strategically centralized in one location
2. Establishes consistent and equal benefits among all 8 Uniformed Services branches and reserve units, and
3. Authorizes the Department of Veterans and Military Families to provide support to our service members, in addition to our veterans.

The advantages are namely:

1. Updates current laws to provide over 100 additional benefits that were being denied to various former and current service members simply because of inconsistent and outdated terminology.
2. Creates a centralized structure that facilitates easy, consistent and standard military laws for future revisions.
3. Codifies the Department's authority and duty to support the service members.

To get an idea of the magnitude of this package, every legislator received a memo this past November from the Department of Veterans and Military Families highlighting 34 sections in our laws with inconsistencies in military terminology.

In contrast, this comprehensive legislative package updates more than 230 sections with over 500 revisions touching nearly every article.

But first a brief refresher on terms so my presentation makes sense:

The term 'Uniformed Services' is comprised of 8 federal branches.

There are 6 military branches of the Uniformed Services (~ 1.3 million active duty):

Referred to as the 'Armed forces':

Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, Navy and Space Force

There are 2 non-military branches of the Uniformed Services (~6,000 active duty nationwide)

- Commissioned Corps Officers of the Public Health Services (PHS)
- Commissioned Corps Officers of the National Oceanic Atmospheric and Administration (NOAA)

I am sure we are all familiar with what our military branches do, but some may not realize what the other non-military branches do to protect our nation.

I won't discuss all PHS and NOAA responsibilities, but I will highlight a few tasks.

PHS sent hundreds of officers over to Afghanistan to assist during the war. Additionally, they were sent over to Africa to help when there was an Ebola outbreak to contain it.

NOAA is involved in almost every mission performed by our military through its coordination of their satellites and weather capabilities. Additionally, you may not know that NOAA was in the Gulf helping sweep for mines during the war.

And that brings me to SB 280. which improves the Courts & Judicial Proceedings Article by updating the uniformed services term to be inclusive of all 8 branches in areas, such as:

1. Consideration for individuals going on duty assignments,
2. Not charging for copies of a marriage certificate, and
3. Uses the Standardized Veteran definition for the Court Dog Program.

This bill updates the Criminal Law Article by updating the uniformed services term to be inclusive of all 8 branches in areas, such as:

1. Using the term 'uniformed services' identification card opposed to 'military identification' as that is the correct terminology.

This bill updates the Family Law Article by updating the uniformed services term to be inclusive of all 8 branches in areas, such as:

1. Timing exemption on marriage licenses for service members, and
2. Consideration for individuals going on duty assignments and deployments.

This bill updates the Public Safety Article by updating the uniformed services term to be inclusive of all 8 branches in areas, such as:

1. Receiving a state flag if died while performing duty,
2. Using the term 'uniformed services' identification card opposed to 'military identification' as that is the correct terminology.
3. Referring to all the honor guards in the uniformed services,
4. Regarding dishonorable discharges,
5. Requirements for all branches in MD Defense Force commissions,
6. Exemptions for the prohibitions on wearing uniforms for all branches,
7. Regarding termination of contracts after receiving orders to relocate apply to all branches of the uniformed services,
8. Prohibitions on refusing service to someone wearing a uniform for all branches, and
9. Provide clarity in military definitions.

Lastly, I would note that in general, these bills are not changing the underlying policy but providing equality among our service members. And worked very hard to keep the fiscal note to zero or within all the Department's current budget.

I could go into much greater depth but will stop there and say, "For all these reasons, I ask for your favorable consideration."