

Dear Delegate Patterson,

I am writing to express my support for HB0587 , *Education - High School Diploma - Veterans of Armed Conflicts*, which seeks to provide high school diplomas to veterans who have served honorably in the armed forces. This bill is a commendable initiative that acknowledges the sacrifices of our veterans and provides them with an important educational credential that can enhance their opportunities and dignity.

As a former correctional officer at our nation's only maximum-security military prison, I witnessed firsthand the profound impact of educational gaps on decision-making and overall life outcomes. Many of the individuals I encountered struggled with effective decision-making, and a lack of educational foundation often contributed to their challenges during and after their service.

While I strongly support this bill, I respectfully urge you to consider expanding its scope to include *all* veterans who served, regardless of the outcome of their military service. Please consider the transformative power of education—not just in creating opportunities but also in fostering mental and social well-being.

It is vital to recognize the diverse circumstances that lead individuals to enlist in the armed forces. Many veterans joined the military despite facing systemic or personal barriers to education. Expanding this opportunity to all veterans would acknowledge their willingness to serve and help address the inequalities they may have faced prior to their service and the challenges they might encounter after service.

This bill answers a threefold call:

1. It restores dignity to veterans by granting them the opportunity to achieve an essential educational milestone.
2. It highlights the universal importance of education as a tool for empowerment and opportunity.
3. It levels the playing field for all who choose to serve, ensuring their sacrifices are honored equally.

While military service is not for everyone, education should be. Expanding the scope of SB0137 will ensure that all veterans, regardless of their circumstances, are given the tools to succeed and thrive in civilian life.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to improving the lives of Maryland's veterans. I look forward to your response and stand ready to support any efforts to further this important initiative.

Sincerely,

LaShonda C. Henderson

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See my proposed virtual testimony to the committee:

Good Afternoon COmmittee, I am LaSHonda C. Henderson US Army Vet residing in Camp Springs Maryland, a private citizen speaking in support of HB0587 **High School Diploma for Veterans of Armed Conflicts** with a request for amendments. Many people often say thank you for your service, but life existed for soldiers BEFORE service.

This bill acknowledges what I feel is a critical milestone in life for many. A high school diploma. Whether 8 or 80 you remember the words of your Mom, Dad or family in general about the importance of education. HB0587 seeks to honor those who served in military conflict acknowledging that they left school to ensure that other citizens are allowed the freedom to attend school..... It's monumental.

While I support the spirit of HB0587, I feel it can be enhanced. As a former correctional officer for our nation's only max security military run prison. I can tell you that, sometimes soldiers fall off their path, they make poor

judgement....oftentimes because they entered this disciplined space from areas that are disadvantaged. The military isn't for everyone, some have trouble adjusting, some encounter systematic barriers, situations out of their control that forced them out of service. But they served. So my request is that this opportunity for a high school diploma be extended to ALL who attempted to give up their freedom and school attainment in service for the freedom of all citizens. **I ask that you consider a general language (removal of the word honorable) that acknowledges any soldier that left high school to serve during the military conflicts listed (serving during the conflict means those who left basic training and served at a duty station.**

Because really only 1 percent, some say 7 percent of Americans enter service and giving up life for another isn't a small task. Thank you for thinking of the human that existed before putting on the uniform and honoring the soldier. Whether through draft or volunteer, citizens leave their families, jobs, hopes and promises made to self and others. They come home to new people, some whole and others missing parts of themselves, bodies and mind. While they don't often come back the same as they were before.

One thing we do as soldiers is think...we think a lot....good times, challenging times, veterans are full of memories of what life could have been like. HB0587 is an opportunity to ease their minds about one milestone, it gives them one less could have, should have, would have, thing to think about. So thank you for thinking of soldiers and acting for those who served. Thank you for your time and consideration.