



Commissioned Officers Association of the United States Public Health Service

Protecting the interests of the USPHS Commissioned Corps since 1951

February 12, 2025

The Honorable Vanessa E. Atterbearsy
The Honorable Jheanelle K. Wilkins
House Ways and Means Committee
130 Taylor House Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report - HB 587 – Education – High School Diplomas - Veterans of Armed Conflict**

Dear Chair Atterbearsy, Vice Chair Wilkins and Members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

On behalf of the Commissioned Officers Association, I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report** by the Committee on **HB 587 – Education – High School Diplomas – Veterans of Armed Conflict**, sponsored by **Senator Simonaire**.

This bill would authorize the granting of a high school diploma to those individuals who left high school before graduating to enlist in the military during armed conflict and who were honorably discharged. This bill recognizes the service of those who set aside their education in order to serve during an armed conflict. Those service members who served honorably and returned to their community obtained valuable skills, training and leadership opportunities while in the service of their country. They deserve a high school diploma that recognizes their sacrifice, service and potential future contributions to their communities.

This bill is personally important to me. My father, MAJ Marcel Gauthier, is a veteran who would have benefitted from this legislation were he alive today. He left school, enlisted and served during the Korean conflict. He was given a field commission under wartime conditions, promoted from enlisted to officer and placed in command of his unit. He served honorably. He returned home and used his GI benefits to go to trade school as he married and



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needed to support my mom, and a year later - ME. After a 2nd tour on active duty, he returned to the Vermont National Guard, from which he retired. While he was encouraged to get his GED, he never did. He went on to do amazingly well in the granite industry. Late in his career, he won the contract to build the Vietnam Memorial. He travelled to Vietnam to select the granite. His company sawed and polished the panels, and then “engraved” them with the names of those lost. I earned “pin money” for my college account by proofing the names on the panel.

I completed a 30 – year career, in both the Army and then the U.S. Public Health Service because of my dad. He was the epitome of honor, service and integrity and I wanted to follow him in service to my country. And behind me, are my two daughters, LCDR Natalie Slepski-Manning, a Navy flight surgeon and Preventive Medicine Officer and her sister LT Jennifer Kime, a Navy trauma nurse. They also followed him into service, and both are married to navy officers. Because of my dad, our family now has three generations of service members.

Any service member who willingly leaves the safety of home to go into war deserves the honor and gratitude of our Nation. The least we can do for these brave men and women is to provide them with the High School diploma that they need to go on with their lives and continue with their contributions to society.

The Commissioned Officers Association ***strongly supports HB 587*** and asks the Committee for a **FAVORABLE report**.

The mission of the Commissioned Officers Association (COA) is to protect and enhance the public health and safety of the United States by supporting and advancing the interests of the Commissioned Corps and its officers through advocacy, education, training and dissemination of professional information. This includes the 1398 officers, 8 Ready Reservists and over 7,000 retirees living in Maryland.

We want to thank Delegate Patterson for her commitment to our veterans and the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,



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