



# 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 Brian J. Feldman  
Chair, Education, Energy and the Environment Committee  
2 West Miller Senate Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Re: Subject: **Request for FAVORABLE Report with Amendments - HB 600 – Educational Equality for Service Members Act**

Dear Chair Feldman and Distinguished Members of the House Education, Energy and the Environment Committee:

On behalf of the Commissioned Officers Association, and as their director representing them in the Maryland Military Coalition, I write to recommend a **FAVORABLE report with Amendments** by the Committee on HB 600 - - **HB 600 – Educational Equality for Service Members Act**. As a retired U.S. Public Health Officer, I have first-hand witnessed events where members of my Corps were denied benefits given to other service members because of the language written or more likely omitted in legislation.

Over the past several years, I have worked relentlessly to try and remediate legislation before it is enacted to ensure that the correct terms and meaning are understood by everyone. As an example, last session I requested an amendment and succeeded in getting inclusion of U.S. Public Health Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration spouses into the Families Serve Act, where service spouses receive priority hiring for Maryland State Government positions. This session, I am asking for a similar amendment to the Burial Equity Act, to codify what is already happening in Maryland State Cemeteries.

HB 600 will update and change the application of certain provisions of law governing education to apply to **ALL** uniformed services, including both the U.S. Public Health and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corp Officers who are NOT members of the armed forces. This is important as Maryland Statute General Provisions § 1-117 states:

Request for **FAVORABLE Report with Amendments - HB 600 – Educational Equality for Service Members Act**

“With respect to any State program of benefits, rights, or privileges application to a veteran under this Code, “veteran” includes, if the individual is eligible under 38 U.S.C. §101, a member of the commissioned corps of:

- (1) The Public Health Service; or
- (2) The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or its predecessor, the Coast and Geodetic Survey

Maryland is home to the headquarters of both the U.S. Public Health Service AND the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Commissioned Corps. In addition to my headquarters, U.S. Public Health Service officers serve in the Department of Health and Human Services operating administrations including the National Institutes of Health, the Food and Drug Administration, the Health Resources and Services Administration, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as well as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, among others. There are over 1,390 active-duty officers, 8 Ready Reservists and nearly 7,000 retired PHS officers living in Maryland—along with their spouses and families. They own homes, buy cars and support the local economy.

I served for a total of 30 active-duty years in both the Army as well as Public Health. I served under combat during Desert Storm – Desert Shield and also under “combat” fighting public health “wars” including 9/11, the Anthrax Attacks on the Capitol and the D.C. postal system, New York and Florida, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the Fukushima Daiichi disaster, Ebola and other major public health events. More often than not, my PHS duties placed me in more perilous positions than much of my Army time. I have TWO DD-214s, and by Maryland law, I am a veteran.

**While I can continue to go about and attempt to right the wrongs of previous legislation on a case-by-case basis, it seems more efficient to update relevant Maryland Code to be inclusive of ALL uniformed services.**

Public Health and NOAA officers work hard and undertake significant activities to improve the health and safety of the Nation. They deserve inclusion in Maryland statute and access to all benefits received by other services. I respectfully request that **HB 600 be amended** to read that “veteran” has the meaning state in Maryland Statute General Provisions § 1-117 and request that this Committee give a FAVORABLE report with Amendments to the bill.

The Commissioned Officers Association **STRONGLY supports HB 600 and asks for a FAVORABLE report with Amendments** as noted above. Updating and implementing the proposed changes will make the Maryland Code consistent with the U.S. Code for key terms relating to the uniformed services and will decrease their misuse in future legislation and policy making.

Request for **FAVORABLE Report with Amendments - HB 600 – Educational Equality for Service Members Act**

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 continued commitment to our veterans and the uniformed services community in Maryland.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lynn A. Nash". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "L".

Lynn A. Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN  
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