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Patrick Moran – President

**SB 491 – Law Enforcement Officers’ Pension System - Military Service Credit
Eligibility – Helicopter Pilots
Appropriations Committee
April 7, 2026**

Position: FAVORABLE

AFSCME Council 3 supports Senate Bill 491, which is a narrowly tailored bill that extends the Military Service Credit to a small number of AFSCME-represented veterans who served our nation for more than twenty years before bringing their skills and experience into the Law Enforcement Officers’ Pension System (LEOPS). The scope of this bill is limited. It primarily affects highly experienced pilots who retired from active-duty U.S. military service and who now serve the people of Maryland in the Maryland State Police Aviation Command.

The Value of Experience

Maryland’s State Police Aviation Command is a national gold standard. Our crews execute high-stakes, multi-mission flights, transitioning seamlessly from medevac and trauma transport to technical aerial hoists and law enforcement search missions in a single sortie. This level of operational flexibility is rare, mirrored only by specialized units like the U.S. Coast Guard.

For over twenty years, Maryland has shifted away from training internal Troopers as pilots. Instead, the State strategically hires highly experienced, career professional aviators, primarily from the U.S. Armed Forces. By doing so, **Maryland inherits millions of dollars in specialized training and flight hours** at no cost to the taxpayer.

SB 491 Corrects a Policy Disparity

Despite the value these veterans bring, our current retirement system contains a glaring inequity that hampers recruitment:

- **The Inequity:** Currently, veterans who retire from the **National Guard or Reserves** can receive service credit within the Law Enforcement Officers’ Pension System (LEOPS). However, those who retired from **Active Duty** are excluded from the same benefit.
- **The Impact:** We frequently see two pilots working side-by-side, performing the exact same dangerous missions, yet one receives retirement credit for their military service while the other does not—simply because of the specific status of their prior service.

A Critical Recruitment Tool

The State Police Aviation Command currently faces significant staffing challenges. We are competing in a fierce regional and national market for helicopter pilots. Senate Bill 491 is a narrowly tailored solution that offers a powerful incentive for elite military aviators to choose a second career in Maryland public service.

This bill does not just address fairness; it ensures that the skills honed over twenty years of military service are recognized and rewarded when it is put to work for the citizens of Maryland.

Conclusion

By equalizing these benefits, we improve morale, honor the full spectrum of military service, and ensure our helicopters remain staffed by the most experienced pilots in the world.

We urge a FAVORABLE report on Senate Bill 491.

