

Testimony in Favor with Amendments for House Bill 1611: Property Tax – Credit for Dwelling House of Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses - Alterations

Before the Senate Budget and Taxation Committee

Chair Guzzone, Vice Chair Rosapepe, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 1611. My name is Alyssa Sanders, and I am the Director of Advocacy at EveryMind, a nonprofit organization that has served Maryland communities for nearly 70 years by providing prevention, early intervention, and mental health services across the continuum of care, including supporting our veteran community through case management services with our ServingTogether program. I thank Senator Salling for bringing this important piece of legislation back this year.

On behalf of EveryMind, I write to request a favorable report with amendments on House Bill 1611 – Property Tax – Credit for Dwelling House of Disabled Veterans and Surviving Spouses – Alterations. This bill would replace the single threshold for federal adjusted gross income for a disabled veteran in with thresholds for disabled veterans filing either an individual income tax return or a joint income tax return. The bill would also revise the disability ratings in the same Section for 50% and 25% property tax credits to align with Department of Veterans Administration ratings, which are awarded in increments of 10%.

As currently written, the Code penalizes a married disabled veteran who files a joint income tax return as the federal adjusted gross income for both exceeds \$100,000 in virtually 100% of returns. Including a provision for a disabled veteran filing a joint tax return, as Senate Bill 980 does, is the right step to take for these individuals and is long overdue. These veterans have been, and are, as deserving as those who have been granted this property tax credit since the law was enacted in 2020.

We also recognize that several Maryland counties have individually enacted some version of property tax credits for disabled veterans with ratings less than 100%, including Anne Arundel, Frederick, Hartford, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties. Additionally on the County front, the counties with the largest numbers of disabled veterans are the counties with the highest Area Median Incomes (AMIs), demonstrating that an amended bill would have a significant impact on the largest number of disabled veterans.

Through our ServingTogether program, EveryMind works closely with veterans, active-duty military members, and their families across the state to provide case management, suicide prevention, and mental health workshops through a military lens. We hear from our clients about the many needs this population faces, and housing is consistently one of the most requested support areas. We recognize the need to help disabled veterans with property tax assistance, especially in light of rising property values.

Our Care Coordination Center recently assisted a post-Vietnam era Air Force Veteran who came to us seeking financial assistance with his property taxes, utilities, and vehicle repairs. As a disabled veteran with a rating less than 100%, he was not able to qualify for property tax exemptions. Thus, the high cost of the property taxes made it hard for him to be able to pay for his other needs, and he lives in Howard County where assistance for these cases is exceptionally difficult to find. Our Care Coordinator was able to connect him to the local Department of Social Services for his tax needs but prioritized helping him find solutions to his other expenses including an application to the Elizabeth Dole Foundation for vehicle repair funds.

While we had to get creative to help this veteran with resources and focus on how we could help him with his other expenses, House Bill 1611 would make it easier to support our veterans' full needs. It would be an important recognition of the sacrifices made by veterans who have become disabled while serving our country. The bill would lessen the financial burden on disabled veterans and increase the likelihood that they can remain in the homes.

Along with the Maryland Military Coalition, EveryMind strongly supports this legislation – with an amendment added to include Area Median Income (AMI) as the income threshold. This requested amendment would create more impact for disabled veterans.

We wish to thank Delegate Pippy for sponsoring this very important legislation and for his continued support of the uniformed services community in Maryland.