

Good afternoon Chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee, thank you for letting me speak today.

My name is Jacob, and I'm a ninth grader at South River High School. I'm the oldest of three brothers. My dad is currently serving in the Navy as a Captain select, and he's been in the Navy for over 23 years. For most of my life, he was gone a lot—he spent 15 years on sea duty—so my mom did a lot of the parenting on her own. My mom also works for the State of Maryland at the Department of Veterans and Military Families, which is part of why I understand how important this bill is.

I'm here today because Senate Bill 192 is about making sure kids like me are actually represented.

I've gone to six different schools so far. Every time we move, I have to start over—new friends, new teachers, new routines. I've had to learn how to adapt quickly, even when it's hard. I've missed birthdays, holidays, and big moments because my dad was deployed. I've also had to grow up fast in some ways, helping with my younger brothers when my dad was away.

Military kids have a different experience growing up. We learn flexibility. But we also deal with stress, anxiety, and uncertainty that a lot of people don't always see.

Senate Bill 192 would add a military-connected youth to the Maryland Youth Advisory Council. That matters—because decisions about young people should include young people who actually live these experiences. We don't just need programs *for* us. We need a voice *in* them.

This bill shows that Maryland understands that service doesn't just affect the person in uniform—it affects their whole family.

I'm proud of my dad. I'm proud of my family. And I'm proud to stand here today and ask you to support this bill so that military kids like me have a seat at the table.

Thank you.