

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2025 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 309

(Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Education, Energy, and the Environment

Health and Government Operations

**Department of Veterans and Military Families - Communications, Outreach, and
Advocacy Program - Alterations**

This bill expands the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program in the Department of Veterans and Military Families (DVMMF) to include providing services to (1) service members and (2) the families of veterans and service members. The Secretary of Veterans and Military Families must include in their annual report a general assessment of communication methods utilized in support of the program. The bill also alters definitions relating to the military.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: DVMMF can implement the bill's requirements with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to materially affect local government operations or finances.

Small Business Effect: Minimal.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The bill adds the following definitions of military terms to § 9-901 of the State Government Article:

- “reserve component” means the Army National Guard of the United States, the Army Reserve, the Navy Reserve, the Marine Corps Reserve, the Air National

Guard of the United States, the Air Force Reserve, the Coast Guard Reserve, or the Reserve Corps of the Public Health Service (as specified under 37 U.S.C. § 101);

- “service member” means an individual who is a member of (1) the uniformed services or (2) a reserve component of the uniformed services; and
- “uniformed services” means the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, Coast Guard, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and Public Health Service (as specified under 38 U.S.C. § 101).

The definition of “veteran” is altered to mean a person who served in the active military, naval, air, or space service, and who was discharged or released under non-dishonorable conditions (as specified under 38 U.S.C. § 101).

Current Law:

Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program – Generally

The Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program within DVMF ensures that veterans are informed of the services, benefits, and assistance available to them and that general issues relating to veterans’ needs are brought to the attention of the Governor and the General Assembly. The program is administered and coordinated by a director, who is appointed by the Secretary of Veterans and Military Families.

The program must actively help veterans and their dependents become aware of and access any service or benefit to which they are entitled, including tax, health care, disability, and pension benefits. In collaboration with the Maryland Higher Education Commission, the program must actively help veterans and their dependents become aware of and access education and training benefits to which they are entitled. The director must support veterans and their dependents through the service or benefit process and refer veterans, veterans’ dependents, and veterans’ survivors to the appropriate governmental unit for claims assistance.

Department of Veterans and Military Families – Annual Report

The Secretary must submit an annual report by December 31 to the Governor and the General Assembly that includes:

- the number of (1) requests for help in obtaining benefits; (2) public contacts made by the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program; (3) veterans enrolled in the U.S. Veterans Health Administration; and (4) veterans receiving benefits;
- the average amount of disability and pension benefits received by qualified individuals in Maryland compared to those in other states;

- an account of the costs of operating the Communications, Outreach, and Advocacy Program;
- a status update on several programs, including cemeteries, memorials, and veterans homes, among others;
- a general assessment of the status of Maryland veterans;
- the estimated impact current *military* operations may have on the needs of veterans in the future (the bill repeals the reference to “*military*”);
- the status of federal veterans programs as they relate to Maryland veterans; and
- any other issues concerning veterans at the Secretary’s discretion.

Additional Information

Recent Prior Introductions: Similar legislation has not been introduced within the last three years.

Designated Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Information Technology; Department of Veterans and Military Families; Department of Legislative Services

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