



THE AMERICAN LEGION
Department of Maryland
Legislative Commission

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**STATEMENT IN SUPPORT FOR HOUSE BILL 872 – SHEILA E. HIXSON
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES MATCHING GRANT PROGRAM for
SERVICE MEMBERS and VETERANS – ESTABLISHMENT**

The American Legion Department of Maryland now serving in its second century in communities throughout Maryland strongly supports Senate Bill 550 now before the Budget and Taxation Committee.

This bill, providing a funding grant to local community service organizations is a sound, fundamental measure which hopefully will stem the rampant use of illegal drugs and opioids among our returning service personnel and, further, could reduce the tragic number of suicides—currently estimated at 22 per day across the nation by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

HB 872 per the *Fiscal and Policy Note* accompanying the bill would provide matching grants to local not-for-profit organizations serving the behavioral needs of their community to tailor recovery programs to veterans in area concerning mental health and substance use and abuse treatment.

Some funds used to support the programs could be minimized by the requirement for grantees to bill third parties such as insurance firms and Medicaid.

Presently there are more than 29,500 active-duty personnel assigned here in our State and an estimated 371,000 veterans who live in Maryland. Veterans, recently returned from combat areas and Vietnam era, are more likely to suffer from a variety of health problems including chronic pain, substance use disorders, chemical exposure problems and mental health issues.

It is these persons HB 872 could help in a direct, concise manner with the goal of returning to their respective communities as a whole person.

In closing, The American Legion representing over 48,000 men and women in our armed forces, veterans who have served in all wars and conflicts since 1917 and their families—all Maryland residents—believes SB 904 is the first step in achieving a comprehensive recovery program for active service, veterans and their dependent families and earnestly and respectfully ask for a favorable report on this bill and applaud Delegate Charles for his

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service to his country and his compassion for his fellow service personnel, veterans and their families.

Yours, respectfully

Melvin F. Graves

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Vice Chair
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