

Testimony of Wes Moore
Former Army Captain and Candidate for Governor
Before the Senate Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee
Veterans Affairs - Office of Communications and Public Affairs - Veterans
Advocacy and Education Act
FAVORABLE (Senate Bill 654)

Chair Pinsky, Vice Chair Kagan, and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee,:

I am here in support of Senate Bill 654 **Veterans Affairs - Office of Communications and Public Affairs - Veterans Advocacy and Education Act.**

I would like to thank Senator Kathy Klausmeier for sponsoring this important bill. It would require collaboration between the State's Department of Veterans Affairs and the Maryland Higher Education Commission. This would help veterans and their families get access to education and job training. Helping them compete in the job market is not only our moral obligation but will create a stronger, better-prepared, workforce.

More than 360,000 veterans call Maryland home. These men and women who have served our country deserve our respect, appreciation, and support. In fact, Maryland is home to 50,000 veteran-owned small businesses. These generate more than \$20 million in sales each year and employ thousands of Marylanders. With an estimated 198,000 job vacancies in Maryland, helping our vets and their families get the skills and training they have earned can help them and our economy.

As a combat veteran and former Army Captain, I understand what our veterans need to succeed. Maryland must do a better job at expanding and improving the quality of care we provide to our veterans and their families. This includes supporting those experiencing mental illness and substance use disorders as well as investing in permanent supportive housing. A critically important step is providing the education and training needed to channel our veterans' remarkable ability, character, and work ethic.

There is a pledge we take in the United States military: leave no one behind. This is something that I and other veterans hold as solemn. I urge the committee to vote favorably on SB 654 so we can start to ensure that the Maryland men and women who took that pledge are not left behind.