



**Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of the Secretary**

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GOVERNOR**

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LT. GOVERNOR**

**ANTHONY C. WOODS
SECRETARY**

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF House Bill 598
Discrimination - Military Status - Prohibition
Health and Government Operations
February 13, 2024**

Chair Pena-Melnyk, Vice Chair Cullison, and members of the committee -

I ask for a favorable report on House Bill 598, a bill to ensure that military status is a protected class and our service members and their families can not be discriminated against.

We believe this bill is necessary to protect service members, veterans, and their families from bias and discrimination in employment, housing, banking, and public accommodations. In various Department of Defense surveys, military spouses and families have reported negative experiences because of their service member's affiliation. Sadly, much of the discrimination faced by service members and their families stems from negative stereotypes surrounding PTSD, unfounded fears of military deployments, and other misconceptions regarding military skills translating into civilian life.

Although Maryland's anti-discrimination laws protect against discrimination in education, employment, housing, public accommodation, lending, insurance, health services, and Civil Rights, none currently apply to military status. We believe that for military families to thrive, we must ensure they are not negatively impacted by the arbitrary whims of harmful stereotypes.

In keeping with Governor Moore's pledge to make 2024 the Year for Military Families, this bill will provide protections for military spouses who may be denied jobs, denied promotions, or excluded from leadership opportunities, simply because they are married to a service member and are likely to move with their families within years. This difficulty in obtaining employment due to frequent moves creates economic instability for families as a direct result of their service to our nation.

I respectfully ask the Committee for a favorable report on HB 598, to protect our service members, veterans, and military families against discrimination based on their military status. Thank you for your consideration.