



City of Baltimore

City Council
City Hall, Room 408
100 North Holliday Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202

Legislation Text

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INTRODUCTORY*

CITY OF BALTIMORE
COUNCIL BILL R
(Resolution)

Introduced by: Councilmember Middleton

A RESOLUTION ENTITLED

A COUNCIL RESOLUTION concerning
Informational Hearing - Benefits for Returning Service Members

FOR the purpose of inviting the Secretary, Maryland Department of Veteran Affairs and the Director, Central Regional Resource Coordinator to share information regarding the services and opportunities available to returning Baltimore City veterans; to describe the outreach efforts to deliver the information to returning service men and women, and; to detail the number and percentage of our veterans that are accessing services offered by private entities and local, state and federal governments.

Recitals

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs was created by the state legislature in 1999 as an executive agency with the mission of assisting veterans, active duty service members, their families, and their dependents in securing benefits earned through military service. The department's service mission includes providing representation to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and other federal, state, and local government agencies for benefits which may be available to eligible individuals.

In June 2006, the Department's Outreach and Advocacy program was authorized by the General Assembly. The Program ensures that veterans know what services, benefits, and assistance the federal and State governments provide for them. Outreach and Advocacy informs and educates veterans and their eligible dependents of business, tax, health care, disability, pension and education benefits to which they might be entitled. The Program also keeps the Governor and General Assembly informed on issues important to veterans that may require gubernatorial or legislative action.

The Veterans Service and Benefits Program assists eligible veterans in applying for veteran benefits. These benefits include education, home loans, insurance, pensions, and compensation for service-related disabilities, as well as benefits for health care, burial, and surviving family members. Through the Program, the Department's Service and Benefits Officers advise, assist and represent Maryland veterans and their families seeking benefits. Veterans Benefits Specialists help veterans develop, prepare, and submit claims for benefits. To achieve these purposes, the Department operates service and benefits offices at various locations throughout the State.

The welcome to Maryland's Commitment to Veterans states that the outreach and referral initiative is designed to serve those who have served our country by connecting veterans to behavioral health services in a timely manner: "America could not succeed without the dedication and sacrifice of our military professionals; however when they return from combat, too many veterans are discovering an unfortunate reality. It is nearly impossible to see clearly through complicated paperwork and an overburdened USVA [U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs] system, let alone find medical services necessary to begin a new chapter of life outside the armed forces."

The Baltimore Regional Office of the USVA serves 484,013 veterans living in the State of Maryland, 2% of the national veteran population. The Regional Office's jurisdiction includes all counties in the State, provides services at the VA Medical Center in Baltimore, Transition Assistance throughout the State, and participates in a homeless veterans outreach program based at the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training.

Four years ago, the Task Force to Study State Assistance to Veterans found that approximately 1.6 million United States troops have served in Iraq and Afghanistan in the prior five years. The Department of Health and Mental Hygiene estimated that at the time there were approximately 15,000 OEF/OIF (Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom)veterans residing in the State. While the number of returning OEF/OIF veterans is small in comparison to the overall numbers of veterans in the State, a large portion of these returning veterans are facing significant challenges in successfully reintegrating into their communities.

Testimony presented before the federal Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on July 27, 2011, Insights from Early RAND Research on Deployment: Effects on U.S. Service Members and Their Families, shows that the problem continues to grow: "September 11, 2011 will mark ten years since the terrorist attacks that precipitated the war on terrorism and the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that continue today. During these ten years more than 2.2 million service members from the active and reserve components have deployed for active duty...apart from battlefield and diplomatic realities, another unique feature has been the public recognition of the stresses borne by service members and their families in wartime and, equally important, the recognition of invisible wounds that can haunt our service members who have deployed that can follow them after they leave the military."

Women Veterans of America reports that women are the fastest growing segment of people serving in the military. As their influence grows, so does the recognition of the special health needs of women vets and those in active service. In response to the gender-specific needs of women, the VA established medical and psychological services especially for women beginning in 1988, and the VA's Women Veterans Health Strategic Health Care Group has grown continually since then.

Women have sexual health and reproductive needs that can be more complicated and sensitive than men's - some women who served in Vietnam learned only later that their close proximity to the chemical Agent Orange was most likely responsible for their child's birth defects. In addition to special case scenarios, women still have concerns about health issues that all women face such as getting regular gynecological care and addressing susceptibility to osteoporosis as they age.

Women are not only serving in the military in clerical and administrative capacities. More and more they are seeing areas torn by war. This means that women veterans are developing more and more mental illness symptoms that were previously only associated with male veterans. Women who have been exposed to war zones may develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Women who have been the victim of sexual assault or rape may also develop PTSD. The VA hospital system has developed counseling and therapy programs designed specifically for the needs of women veterans who find themselves in the grip of mental illness.

We in Baltimore City honor our returning men and women veterans and their families, deeply appreciate the sacrifices they have made in wartime, and pledge to assist them in securing the health, psychological, educational, and employment services they require to successfully return to civilian life in our communities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF BALTIMORE, That the Secretary, Maryland Department of Veteran Affairs and the Director, Central Regional Resource Coordinator are invited to share information regarding the services and opportunities available to returning Baltimore City veterans; to describe the outreach efforts to deliver the information to returning service men and women, and; to detail the number and percentage of our veterans that are accessing services offered by private entities and local, state and federal governments.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Resolution be sent to the Mayor, the Secretary, Maryland Department of Veteran Affairs and the Director, Central Regional Resource Coordinator, the Lieutenant Governor, the Baltimore City Senate and House Delegation to the Maryland General Assembly, and the Mayor's Legislative Liaison to the City Council.

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