

Senate Bill 615 General Provisions - Commemorative Days - Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day

Education, Energy, and the Environment Committee

March 8, 2024

Position: SUPPORT

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 615.

SB 615 requires the Governor to annually proclaim July 11 as Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day.

Statistics related to the prevalence of mental health disorders among U.S. veterans are startling. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), approximately 18.5 percent of service members returning from Iraq or Afghanistan have post-traumatic stress disorder or depression, and 19.5 percent report experiencing a traumatic brain injury during deployment. Approximately 50 percent of returning service members who need treatment for mental health conditions seek it, but only half who receive treatment receive adequate care.

The rate of suicide among veterans is a national tragedy. There were 6,392 veteran suicide deaths in 2021 – an average of 17.5 every day – including 89 Marylanders.¹ Suicide is the second-leading cause of death among veterans under 45.²

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Maryland is home to approximately 350,000 veterans. A Maryland Veterans Suicide Awareness Day will demonstrate support for these individuals and their families, raise awareness about veteran suicide, and help prevent suicide deaths. For these reasons, MHAMD supports SB 615 and urges a favorable report.

¹ <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2021/2021-State-Data-Sheet-Maryland-508.pdf>

² https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp

For more information, please contact Dan Martin at (410) 978-8865