



2017 Maryland Veteran's Agenda

<u>EDUCATION</u>	<u>EMPLOYMENT</u>	<u>HEALTH</u>	<u>TAXATION</u>	<u>PERSONAL MATTERS</u>
Retraining Assistance	Transition Assistance	Access to Quality Care	100% Retirement Exemption	Veteran Resource Centers
College Prerequisite Grants	Veteran Hiring Preference	Suicide Prevention	Transfer Benefits to Survivors	Veterans Villages
Resident Tuition Rates	Certifications and Licensure	Reintegration	Definitions of "Veteran"	Community Reintegration
Translate Training to Credits	Info Sharing & Outreach	Behavioral Health	Veteran Friendly Gestures	Burials & Cemeteries
Scholarship Continuity	Activated Job Protection	Administrative Matters	Veteran's Trust Fund Support	Suicide Prevention
Veteran Resource Centers		Health Impact Resources	Overseas Pay Exemption	Natural Resources & Parks
Purple Heart Scholarship			Student Loan Forgiveness	Documented Veterans Status
Public Education of Benefits			Property Tax Exemption	Definitions of "Veteran"
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2017 Veterans Agenda

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EDUCATION

1. State Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP)

The expired federal VRAP program offered up to 12 months of training assistance that led to a high demand occupation to unemployed Veterans not eligible for other VA education benefit programs (like the GI Bill). The VRAP program ended in 2014.

We propose a retraining program focused on trade and certification education and training, without an age requirement, for the Veteran not qualified for the GI Bill education benefits, targeted for non-degree programs to include certification programs and trade training.

2. Math and Computer Science Prerequisite Grants

Many community college degree and non-degree programs have prerequisite math and computer science courses. These courses are required but do not earn college or certification credit. Veterans using the GI Bill on these courses spend their funds without any reward of college credit; instead, the GI Bill is used for preparatory non-credit college courses.

To avoid GI Bill usage with no college credit, we recommend a state grant for Veterans enrolled in prerequisite math and computer science courses. Also, Veterans enrolled in high demand community college degree programs will be have discounted tuition rates.

3. In-County Resident Tuition Rates

For community colleges in multiple counties or Veterans attending community colleges outside their residential county, in-county community college tuition rates will apply. Additionally, the 12 month state residency requirement will be waived.

4. Consistently Translate Military Training to College Credit

The American Council of Education (ACE) has a well-defined guide that outlines how military training translates to college credit. Presently, not all community colleges use this guide to determine Veteran military training to college credit. The unstandardized implementation of the guidelines is inconsistent and unfair to Veterans.

Community colleges should accept the American Council of Education (ACE) guide as policy, and identify an advisory council with at least two Veterans to review the Veteran military transcripts to ensure proper translation of experience to credit.

5. College Scholarship Continuity for Activated Reservists and Guard

Military reservists and guard are called to active duty when needed. Many reservists and guard members lose college scholarships when called to serve due to scholarship time restraints and lack of scholarship usage.

We propose that reservists and guardsmen/women called to active duty service retain their scholarship funding but on a hold status until discharge/release from active duty without penalty, when the scholarship will be resumed.

6. Veteran Resource Centers in Community Colleges

State and Federal Veteran agencies and service organizations have numerous, but little known programs and supports available to Veterans.

Based on a percentage of Veteran enrollments, community colleges will provide a military community Veteran resource center with Veteran resource/services and a meeting area for military families. The Veteran resource center will be a part of the college community outreach program.

7. Purple Heart Veterans Scholarship

Presently, retired Purple Heart Veterans are afforded an education scholarship for their dependents.

We propose a new program that opens the program to all Purple Heart Veterans with no restrictions on time in service.

8. Public Education of Veteran Benefits

Many Veterans do not reach out or ask questions about their benefits, hence, Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) need to be creative in getting information to the families in other ways.

As a community service, a public service announcement at local movie theaters as a pre-movie presentation designed to educate the community on Veteran education benefits. This presentation will include an outline of benefits and a POC phone number and email address.

9. Law Enforcement Education of Veteran Aliments

The numbers of arrests and law infractions by Veterans suffering from PTSD is on the increase.

Based on a high number of law enforcement actions involving Veterans suffering from combat trauma, we propose training for law enforcement agencies on Veteran-related combat trauma or invisible wounds and arrest/approach procedures.

10. Veteran PTS Counselors Scholarship

With the high number of Veterans returning from combat with PTS issues, there is a growing need for Veteran PTS counselors. Veterans relate and trust other Veterans. Training Veteran PTS counselors to help our returning combat Veterans will significantly assist them in their healing process.

We propose the establishment of a scholarship program with the University of Maryland Health Services to recruit Veterans for PTS counselor training. These newly trained Veteran counselors will return to their agencies to train others.

EMPLOYMENT

1. Transition Assistance

Public - Private Partnerships: Initiate, facilitate and enable the formation of public – private partnerships to assist with transition skills training. (e.g. resume writing, interviewing, strengths identification, “tell your story”). The translation of military skill-sets and experience into terms that better resonate with the demand signal from the prospective employer base can be challenging, and ensuring clear communication of that information is key to a successful transition. Many of the organizations represented at the summit offer information, services and assistance that could be better (i.e. more broadly) communicated to, and used by, Veterans if their contact with Veterans returning to the civilian sector were better facilitated. Public - private partnerships could bring resources to bear on this problem area in a united demonstration of the importance of Veterans to the workforce.

State University Transition Office Assistance: Leverage state-school (university) placement offices as a resource for transitioning Veterans. University placement offices have been established to ensure that graduating students are offered the tools (resume writing and interviewing skills) and opportunities (interviews / employer contacts) to leverage their education to pursue a career. This established organization, staff and network could be leveraged to also serve transitioning Veterans.

2. Veteran Hiring Preference

Employer Incentives: The continuation and/or expansion of employer incentives for the preferential hiring of Veterans is recommended, with particular consideration to tax breaks.

Statistics & Goal Tracking: Establish a goal / metric at the state level that supports growth in Veteran-owned small business, the employment of Veterans, or the overall image of Maryland as a uniquely Veteran-friendly state.

Non-Competitive Selection: Comprehensive review of policy, regulation and law language to ensure clarity pursuant to non-competitive selection. As an example, current language may pose undue burden on prospective employers in that they “shall interview service disabled Veterans” which can be interpreted to mean “all” rather than “all qualified” – which could constitute a significant burden if not all service disabled Veterans applying for a position are truly qualified.

Reasonable Accommodation Assistance: Small business financial assistance or incentives for reasonable accommodation of disabled Veterans might offset or counter the employer perception that there is an additional cost to them for employing a disabled Veteran. Whether it is education on assistance already available (e.g., through the VA) or supplemental assistance available through a state program, mitigation of cost associated with making reasonable accommodations could make the employment of disabled Veterans more attractive.

3. Certifications and Licensure

Recognition & transfer of military experience: Certifications and licenses that are aligned (even partially) with recognized skill-sets / billets / MOS / designators in the military services should have

documented pre-recognition of that experience to facilitate the rapid qualification and award of Veteran applicants.

Expedited professional licensing: Consideration should be given to establishing priority handling and processing of Veteran applications for certification and licensure.

Facilitate support via DLLR, MDVA and employer incentives: Implementation of associated certification and licensure initiatives to benefit Veterans should be managed across all relevant organizations and stakeholders.

Emphasize & facilitate apprenticeships in trades: Not all Veterans are interested in pursuing a 4-year degree or attending university. Unions and industry are all experiencing a workforce shortage pursuant to trades that often employ apprenticeship programs and technical school accession paths. The availability of training and apprenticeship for such career-paths should be emphasized and facilitated.

4. Information Sharing and Outreach

Inclusive Outreach Literature: Ensure that outreach literature is inclusive (i.e. not gender-specific). Some literature provided to the Veteran community incorporates imagery designed to resonate with a predominately male demographic. While this may represent a normal marketing strategy (targeting the high-percentage of a population), it is inappropriately exclusive and should be aggressively corrected.

Employer Education: Employers have a perception (stereotype) of Veterans that characterizes them as difficult to retain and/or that hiring them comes with a higher degree of uncertainty and burden. This stereotype / bias can be countered with information (e.g., support available to Veterans = less burden on employer) and well-documented, positive examples (e.g. success stories – corroborated / endorsed by employers). This action / effort could be dovetailed nicely with the public / private teaming recommendation proposed under transition assistance.

5. Consistent Employment Protection

Review and Extend: Review policy, regulation and law for applicability and extension beyond “Veteran” to groups that should benefit but might otherwise be inappropriately or inadvertently excluded by current language documentation (e.g. national guard, reservist, spouse, caregiver).

HEALTH

1. Access to Quality Care

Adopt Maryland state and local community initiatives supportive of the Veterans Choice Program designed to afford all Veterans a choice of quality health care options (public and private).

Endorse evidence-based integrative and multidisciplinary health care alternatives. Points of emphasis for Veterans' health care must include: continuity of care, and fully informed written consent (consistent with DoDI 6000.14 Patient's Bill of Rights).

Support military cultural competence education programs for health care providers and others serving our Veterans.

2. Suicide Prevention

Veterans are at an increased risk for suicide; an average of 20 Veterans die by suicide each day. In consonance with the Defense Suicide Prevention Office and VA guidance, support Maryland initiatives advancing community-based and holistic approaches to suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention using a range of medical and non-medical resources (public, private, and non-profit). There is an increased risk for suicide associated with National Guard and Reserves transitions such as activation, deployments, and reintegration.

Outreach and education efforts must be comprehensive, and include: the Veteran, family members, caregivers, educators, & other organizations. Fully informed consent criteria remain germane (all demographics affected).

3. Reintegration with Community

Reintegration programs and services must be made available to service members and their families, and include training for others that care for Veterans. Reintegration programs should focus on emphasizing wellness, self-care and protective measures that promote help-seeking, resilience and facilitate gaining access to the broader community support environment. Support relevant experiential training initiatives, to include: life coping skills role play, sensitivity training, service dog training, case studies, simulators and games.

4. Veteran Behavioral Health

Veterans struggling with mental health conditions, such as depression or post-traumatic stress, and those with substance abuse disorders or other addictive behaviors deserve integrated and effective care. The proportion of Veterans Health Administration users with mental health conditions or substance use disorders increased from approximately 27 percent in 2001 to more than 40 percent in 2014. No demographic is immune to our opioid crisis. Ensure behavioral health programs and funding support integrated service delivery to Veterans.

5. Unique Administrative Matters

Personal Records: Require healthcare providers to provide Veterans copies of their medical records at no charge if the records are to be used to apply for benefits of any kind. Support creation of state Veterans' facility ombudsman; provides correspondence between ombudsman and complainant is confidential, relates to inspection of any facility and access to records as necessary for investigation.

Security Clearance Sensitivity: Provide timely updates to Veterans and organizations regarding changes to clearance-related policy directives, such as: 2016 revisions to the psychological and emotional health questions on the Standard Form 86 questionnaires for national security positions.

Consistent Legislation: Be comprehensive throughout all Veteran-related legislation, to include the guard and reserve.

6. Resources with Health Impact

Service Animals: augment the Maryland Veterans Service Animal Program with budgeted funding.

Homelessness: In Maryland, there were 555 homeless Veterans and 119 (21%) of them were unsheltered in 2016. Ending Veterans' homelessness allows them to address health issues, improves treatment plan compliance, and improves likelihood of employment.

Transportation: Lack of transportation creates a barrier to health care access, and contributes to feelings of isolation. Provide funding to state regional transportation initiatives supporting our Veteran community.

TAXATION

1. 100% Military Retirement Pay Exemption for State Taxes

Current \$5,000 exemption on military retirement is not effective in attracting skilled retirees to settle in Maryland, particularly in light of the 100% exemption in other states. Maryland has a dire need for skilled, cleared retirees to fill the growing needs of Ft Meade and other Federal Government high tech centers. Pennsylvania tags parked in the employee parking lots of some of Maryland's biggest – and growing – employers tell the story. For want of a break on retirement pay, the State is losing revenue on higher paying second career jobs, not to mention sales, property taxes, etc. that benefit local government. The gain in revenue will be several times the initial loss if the State were to forgo taxes on military retirement pay.

2. Transfer Benefits to Survivors of Veterans

All benefits – tax, fees, assistance, etc. – should pass directly and without caveat to surviving spouses, dependent children, other dependents or SBP beneficiaries.

3. Consistent, Complete Legal Definition of “Veteran”

Various law articles define Veterans as members of the four Military Services. Some include the Coast Guard. Most, if not all, leave out NOAA and USPHS. Define Veterans as having served honorably in the SEVEN Uniformed Services.

4. Being Veteran Friendly with Small Gestures

Drop small fees (fishing/hunting license, State Park entrance) to welcome Veterans. Likewise, encourage Veteran small business (vets start more small businesses per capita than any other segment of society) by dropping vet incorporation/licensing/other business fees. Advertise, advertise, advertise: Visitors should be greeted by “Governor Hogan and Maryland’s Veterans Welcome You!”

5. Maryland Veteran’s Trust Fund – Tax Return Check-off

Add check off block to state income tax form to support this 100% donation-funded, State administered fund to help Veterans. Similar to the “Save the Bay” and “Cancer Research” blocks already in use.

6. Increase Overseas Pay Exemption for Junior Active Duty

Current cap of \$30,000 has not kept up with inflation and pay increases. Raise exemption to \$45,000 in order to cover the population the original legislation had in mind.

7. Exempt Student Loan Forgiveness for 100% Disabled Veterans

Subtraction modification to Federal Adjusted Gross Income for 100% Disabled Vets who have had their student loans forgiven.

8. Expanded Property Tax Exemption

Veterans often live on fixed or low incomes. Reduce or cap property taxes for disabled, senior or retired Veterans.

PERSONAL MATTERS

1. Veteran Resource Centers in Each County

Veterans need a comprehensive center that consolidates timely, information essential to making effective transitions, access to retraining, and focused reintegration resources.

Every county should have dedicated staffing at a One-Stop shop offering wraparound services. Localities can repurpose former government buildings to house them, and build capability and capacity with partnerships.

2. Veterans Villages

Veterans who have difficulty with reintegration may become homeless, unemployed, or financially challenged.

A focused location for housing, training, reintegration assistance with aligned job opportunities could mitigate challenges for distressed Veterans. Localities can explore land disposition, incentives and surveys to find land suitable for villages, while making the process to establish them easier for VSO's.

3. Community Training on Veteran Culture

People who need to support and understand Veterans often cannot fully comprehend the culture that they were inculcated with.

Training for civil and government personnel who deal with Veterans is essential. Focusing on "Justice for Vets", train law enforcement in Military Culture and expand Veteran Drug Courts as a state priority.

4. Burials & Cemeteries

Veterans without families sometimes find their lives ending without the final dignity they deserve from a grateful citizenry.

Maryland should require funeral homes to confirm Veterans status for indigent deceased before making final arrangements. For unclaimed Veterans, the state should request non-deployable service members or VSO's for honors and establish casino/lottery set-aside funding to support. This should apply to all services, including USCG, NOAA, Public Health Service, Reserves, state guard.

5. Suicide Prevention

22 Veterans commit suicide every day.

Maryland should target the Veteran population for training & awareness, including Veteran families and friends, and the circles around Veterans. Outreach should be **intrusive**, not "we cannot reach out to that group."

6. Natural Resources & Parks

Natural Resources & Parks Department should affirmatively recruit Veteran crews; especially for fire and CCCP-like projects. Maryland State parks mirror federal parks – entry should be free for Veterans.

7. Veterans Status on Documentation

Many businesses as well as federal/state/local government agencies offer selective opportunities and discounts to Veterans.

Maryland should confirm Veteran status on all drivers' licenses and/or state IDs, and link DMV and federal DD214 databases for official use.

8. Consistent, Complete Legal Definition of "Veteran"

All seven uniformed services should be equally respected in the law.

Include NOAA, Public Health Service, state guard and Reserves in all Veteran benefits and issues when defining Veteran and retiree benefits, specifically include state guard and reserve language.

9. Judicial Considerations for Deployed Members

Veterans are often involuntarily deployed while legal issues and obligations proceed on their own schedule.

Maryland should affirm that courts cannot use military or deployment status as a negative/against the Veteran. The state should allow electronic testimony for deployed Veterans. The state should consider allowing non-spouse directions/desires in cases of deployed Veterans.

10. Positive Portrayal of Veterans

Veterans are neither the "whipped puppy" nor John Wayne. Veterans appreciate when citizens thank them for their service, but were honored to have served their Nation with their fellow Veteran.

Veterans, like everyone else, prefer to be seen as able-bodied contributing citizens. Veterans hope to set an example, seek and take responsibility – in short, Veterans aspire to be Leaders. Veterans do not seek charity, they yearn for the Opportunity to Lead. Present them as Leaders and they will display honor, courage and commitment to be proud of.

Transition: the process or a period of changing from one state or condition to another.

Reintegration: the action or process of integrating someone back into society.

Retraining: teach (someone) new skills, especially so that they can do a different job.