

06/09/2024

DEAR COUNCIL COMMITTEE,

Hello, my name is Charlie Guardado. I have been a resident of Maryland for over 38 years, a combat veteran, and a father. I honorably served in the Marine Corps from 2004-2008 as an Infantry Rifleman with 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines, Kilo Company, completing two combat deployments to Al Anbar, Iraq. Currently, I am 70% service connected through Veterans Affairs for PTSD and Tinnitus.

Today, I want to express my strong support for the proposed bill by Council Member Natali Fani-Gonzalez. I have been suffering in silence for too long, and I finally want my voice to be heard. I wish to provide my support for this bill and serve as a voice for veterans who still suffer in silence. I strongly believe much more can be done to support veterans living in Maryland and across the United States and how this bill can support and reduce the challenges veterans face with their living situations.

The Veterans Affairs system is flawed, leading to lifelong impacts, particularly when disability ratings are incorrect or misinterpreted. I feel abandoned by the system and I have lost faith in the way matters are handled and how veterans who file for service-connected disabilities are not at the correct percentages. The list is endless. The suicide rates among veterans are high. There is a problem and this bill is on the right track.

The decision to create a bridge for those with service-connected disabilities should apply universally, regardless of whether a veteran is rated at 50% or 100%. As an example, on my worst days as a combat veteran who struggles with paralyzing PTSD, I am 100% disabled, but on paper, I am only 70% disabled. We need to close this divide with certain percentages during service time as it remains a significant burden.

Furthermore, living in a city environment is particularly challenging because of my increased anxiety, paranoia, and Hyper-vigilance because of my time in combat. It is mentally exhausting and that feeling never goes away. This has often left me feeling housebound, and the current housing market has made it challenging to consider purchasing a home outside of the city. Should this bill pass, it will significantly help veterans with PTSD or those with other service-connected disabilities to have an increased chance at purchasing a property in a more suitable area, better managing PTSD triggers with the support of the military community.

This bill will offer a new beginning for all veterans who are 50% or more service-connected. While it may not entirely repair the flawed system or even put a significant dent in it, it will build a path to an improved system and, most importantly, provide much-needed support to veterans, both those with voices and those without.

Maryland holds a special place in my heart and will forever be my home. Thank you for listening, and God bless you all.

Semper Fidelis,

Charlie Guardado