



**MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS & MILITARY FAMILIES**

**Office of the Secretary**

**WES MOORE**  
*Governor*  
**ARUNA MILLER**  
*Lt. Governor*  
**ANTHONY WOODS**  
*Secretary*

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**Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families**

**FY 2026 Capital Budget**

**Response to Department of Legislative Services Analysis**

HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

CAPITAL BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE

Delegate Mark Chang

February 17, 2025

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SENATE BUDGET AND TAXATION COMMITTEE

CAPITAL BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE

Senator Craig Zucker

February 18, 2025

## ***Introduction***

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The Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families (DVMF) appreciates this opportunity to update the Committee on the activities of the Department over the past year as we fulfill our mission: to deliver services and programs to assist veterans, their families and survivors in obtaining Federal, State, and local benefits provided by law in recognition of their service to state and country. We also welcome this chance to respond to the Department of Legislative Services' (DLS) analysis of the FY 2026 Governor's Allowance.

This document contains the following information:

- A letter from Secretary Anthony Woods
- The Department's responses to questions and recommendations from the Department of Legislative Services.
- A summary of capital funding for the second State veterans Home in Sykesville.
- A summary of PAYGO, GO Bond and capital funding in the Department's Cemeteries Program since FY 2006.
- A profile of the Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families.
- A summary of services provided by the Department in the Service, Cemetery, and Veterans Home Programs.
- A brief history of the Department.
- Demographic trends among Maryland's veterans.

***DVMF concurs with the Governor's Allowance for FY 2026.***

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Dear Senator Zucker, Delegate Chang, and members of the Subcommittees:

In 2024, we reached significant milestones that reflect our steadfast commitment to serving those who have served. Among our proudest achievements was the passage of 24 bills aimed at improving the lives of veterans, service members, and their families. These bills expanded healthcare access, created new employment opportunities, and strengthened essential support systems statewide. To better represent the communities we serve, we renamed our department, reaffirming our dedication to supporting veterans, service members, their families, and caregivers. Additionally, we established a Deputy Secretary position focused on Military Family Policy & Programs, created the Commission on Veterans and Military Families, and designated Maryland's first Veterans Suicide Prevention Day—further underscoring our commitment to addressing critical needs.

Our Benefits Program had a record-breaking year, filing 5,073 claims—the most since 2016—resulting in over \$44 million in monetary benefits for veterans, dependents, and survivors. We expanded our reach by opening a new benefits office in Cecil County and increasing staff at other locations, ensuring more veterans and families could access the support they deserve.

This year, the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund launched its first online application process, making it easier for veterans and military families to request emergency financial assistance. In 2024, the fund awarded nearly half a million dollars in grants to help prevent foreclosures, evictions, car repossessions, and utility shutoffs, providing critical support to those in need.

Our Cemeteries and Memorial Program honored 3,302 veterans and dependents with dignity and respect. This year also marked an important change, as National Guard and Reservists became eligible for burial in Maryland Veterans Cemeteries—a meaningful step in recognizing their service.

Through Maryland Joins Forces (MJF), we continue to lead collaborative efforts that deliver tangible results. This year, we achieved 18 memoranda of agreement with partners committed to supporting military families. Highlights include hosting a “Rock Your Profile” workshop with Fort Meade and LinkedIn, and storytime events for military-connected children in partnership with Blue Star Families and United Through Reading. These collaborations also extended to higher education, with American University awarding its first MJF scholarship to a military-connected graduate student. Together, we are building a stronger community and setting a national example for supporting military families.

I want to thank you, the members of the General Assembly, and Governor Moore for your support as we strive to make Maryland the best state in the nation to be a member of the veteran and military-connected community.

Respectfully,  
Anthony (Tony) Woods  
Secretary

## ***DLS Questions / DVMF Responses***

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Page 6: The Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery Expansion and Improvements Phase VI received its first funding in fiscal 2024. It was previously estimated to be completed in fiscal 2027. Due to a delay in the project's schedule, funding scheduled for fiscal 2025 was deferred to fiscal 2026. However, due to the need to remove State residency requirement to be eligible for VCGP, the project's previously estimated need for fiscal 2026 funding has been further deferred to fiscal 2027. This is in anticipation that departmental bills HB 138 and SB 237 introduced in the 2025 session, which will remove the State residency requirement and make the project eligible for VCGP starting fiscal 2027. Even if the changes to the residency requirement are enacted, the project has not progressed enough through the design phase to require federal funds in fiscal 2026.

**DVMF should brief the committees on the status of the Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery project and the possibility of the project being eligible for the federal VCGP award in fiscal 2026.**

Agency Response:

*The status of the Garrison Forest grant submission (MD-23-32) is still pending due to recent changes in legislation, which are expected to be resolved by July 1, 2025. Currently, the submission is listed as ineligible, but it remains on the FY25 Priority List, ranked 45th out of 72. MD-23-32 is presently categorized as Priority 3; however, it is expected to be moved to Priority 1 once the FY26 Priority List is released on October 1, 2025. It's crucial to understand that being on the priority list does not guarantee a grant award. Instead, the priority list ranks projects based on their potential eligibility for funding.*

*For a grant to be awarded, each submission must complete both the design and bidding phases. Only then can the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be issued by the VCGP, leading to the grant award. The VCGP needs to know the final bid cost before awarding the grant for expansion, as this determines the project's funding requirements.*

*As other projects on the priority list receive grant awards, they will be removed from the list, which will cause the rankings of remaining projects, including ours, to improve. We will have a clearer picture of the number of grants awarded and the updated rankings by mid-September.*

**DVMF should brief the committees on the current ranking of both cemetery projects on the VCGP priority list and the likelihood of both projects receiving a federal award to begin construction in fiscal 2027.**

Agency Response:

*The priority rankings for the grant submissions for Crownsville (MD-24-33) and Garrison Forest (MD-23-32) remain unchanged. These rankings will stay the same until other states' fully eligible projects ahead of us on the priority list receive grant awards, at which point those funded projects will be removed from the list. It's important to note that attempting to predict the likelihood of receiving a grant by considering which projects were offered opportunities in previous years is misleading. The actual grant award won't happen until the cemeteries fulfill the required conditions, such as completing the design and contract award phases, which can extend into the September timeframe.*

*We also will not know the total number of pre-applications until July 2025. Once our project reaches a ranking that qualifies it for a grant opportunity, we must have our design, cost estimates, and the completed bidding process in place, with the winning contractor ready to begin. Only then will the VCGP issue a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and award the grant. This must all be completed before the end of the fiscal year to secure the funding allocated for that year. If we fail to meet these requirements, our project will be moved to the next fiscal year's priority list and will be subject to a new ranking.*

**2ND VETERANS HOME—CAPITAL  
BUDGET (000)**

FY	Project	GF	FF	TF
2026	2 <sup>ND</sup> Veterans Home - Sykesville	0	0	0
2025	2 <sup>ND</sup> Veterans Home - Sykesville		47,881	47,881
2024	2 <sup>ND</sup> Veterans Home - Sykesville	6,326		6,326
2023	2 <sup>ND</sup> Veterans Home - Sykesville	63,261		63,261
<b>TOTAL Funds</b>		<b>69,587*</b>	<b>47,881**</b>	<b>117,468</b>

*\* GF in the chart above were not appropriated to DVMF but placed in the Dedicated Purpose Account (DPA). \$62,887,000 of the prior GF is recommended for reversion, and the remaining \$6,700,000 was transferred to DGS to complete the 100% construction documents, which are expected to be delivered in June 2025.*

*\*\*The Governor's Allowance recommends canceling the \$47.881 million FF appropriation for FY 2025.*

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**CEMETERY PROGRAM—CAPITAL BUDGET  
(000)**

FY	Project	PAYG O or GO Bond	FF	TF
2026	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery – Expansion and Improvements Phase IV	113		113
2025	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery – Expansion and Improvements Phase IV	1,112		1,112
2024	Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery—Expansion Phase VI	1,111		1,111
2021	Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery—Expansion		1,227	1,227
2020	Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery—Expansion		11,538	11,538
2019	Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery—Expansion		2,000	2,000
2018	Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery—Expansion		7,720	7,720
2017	Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery—Burial Expansions and Improvements	1,360		
	Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery—Expansion	820		
	Eastern Shore Veterans Cemetery—Columbaria and Gravesite Expansion		259	2,439
2016	Rocky Gap Veterans Cemetery—Columbaria and Gravesite Expansion	80	3,811	
	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion Phase III		484	
	Eastern Shore Veterans Cemetery—Columbaria and Gravesite Expansion	26		4,401
2015	Rocky Gap Veterans Cemetery—Columbaria and Gravesite Expansion	400		
	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion Phase III		930	
	Eastern Shore Veterans Cemetery—Columbaria and Gravesite Expansion	45	2,980	4,355

2014	Eastern Shore-Cemetery Columbaria Installation	414		
	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion Phase III		5,983	6,397
2013	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion Phase III	700		700
2010	Eastern Shore-Cemetery Columbaria Installation	Canceled		
	Rocky Gap-Cemetery Columbaria Installation	Canceled		
2009	Garrison Forest-Administration and Alterations to Administration / Maintenance Complex		6,912	6,912
2008	Garrison Forest-Administration and Alterations to Administration / Maintenance Complex	210		
	Garrison Forest Cemetery burial grounds expansion		3,488	3,698
2007	Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion		3,743	
	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion		1,009	
	Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion	575		5,327
2006	Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion	379		
	Crownsville Veterans Cemetery burial grounds expansion	252		631
<b>TOTAL Funds</b>		<b>7,597</b>	<b>52,084</b>	<b>59,681</b>



## ***Agency Profile***

### *Purpose*

The mission and purpose of the Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families is to assist veterans, active duty service members, and their families and dependents in securing benefits earned through military service. The agency fulfills this mission through **veterans benefits services**; a robust **veterans cemetery program**; maintenance of the **State's veteran memorials**; provision of **skilled nursing and assisted living care** for veterans and eligible spouses at the State's veterans home; **communications, outreach and advocacy**; and administration of the **Maryland Veterans Trust Fund**, all while exercising responsible management of available resources.

### ***Core Functions***

- Provide the most effective possible **statewide benefits services** to veterans, their dependents and survivors; assist in the preparation, development, and submission of claims for adjudication to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Honor the memory of Maryland veterans through providing interment in **State veterans cemeteries** that will come to be considered as national shrines.
- Maintain and protect the **State's veteran memorials**.
- Provide the finest assisted living and skilled nursing residential care to qualified Maryland veterans and eligible spouses at the **Charlotte Hall Veterans Home**.
- Ensure through effective **communication, outreach and advocacy** that veterans and their dependents, including Maryland's **women, minority, and underserved veteran populations**, are increasingly informed and educated about the various benefits and services to which they are entitled as a result of their service.
- Provide **non-emergency, temporary monetary assistance** to veterans facing financial hardship, through the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund.

### **FY 2024 At A Glance**

Maryland Veteran Population (2024 projection): 352,000\*

The Service Program *filed 5,073 claims on behalf of Maryland veterans (a 13% increase from FY 2023) and achieved a record \$44.7 million in veterans benefits awards (a 15.5% increase from FY 2023).*

The Cemetery Program performed *3,302 interments: 2,000 veterans, 54 national guard/reservist, and 1,248 dependents.* The Memorials Program continued its *100% satisfactory record* with events held at the State's veterans memorials.

Under PruittHealth's leadership, Charlotte Hall Veterans Home *increased its census, transitioned to a fully dedicated in-house nursing team, eliminating reliance on outside agency nursing staff and hired full-time personnel* to ensure consistent, high-quality care.

Among its many roles and initiatives, DVMF's small Communication, Outreach and Advocacy team *continued its vital participation in the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and Families (SMVF); set new records with 4.2 million client contacts and 2.44 million newsletters distributed; and recorded 799,728 social media views.*

DVMF continued *progress toward the longstanding goal of establishing a second State veterans home in Sykesville.*

\*Source: United States Department of Veterans Affairs VETPOP2020

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## ***Summary of Services Provided***

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Our **Service Program** requires knowledge of relevant US Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) rules and operating policies and procedures. Employees must have the skills to apply the required knowledge within USDVA systems to successfully provide veterans and their families with all the services needed to obtain their benefits and entitlements. Each veterans benefits specialist must be certified as a veterans' services counselor by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

Our **Cemetery Program** requires knowledge of relevant U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration policies and procedures regarding capital construction, land management, and building and equipment maintenance and procurement. These increasingly demanding standards provide direction for the Program's operations and the pursuit of national shrine status for Maryland's veterans' cemeteries.

Our **Memorials Program** requires the skills necessary to maintain such landmarks as reverent symbols of the sacrifices made by veterans.

Our **Veterans Home Program**, which provides assisted living and skilled nursing residential care program for veterans and eligible spouses, requires knowledge of relevant U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and State of Maryland laws, operating policies and procedures, and facility management standards to ensure safe and proper health care to an aging, predominantly male, veteran resident population.

Our **Communications, Outreach and Advocacy (COA) Program** requires not only a constantly growing understanding of the needs of veterans but also the communication skills and tools to reach Maryland's estimated 352,000 veterans and to advocate for them.

The **Maryland Veterans Trust Fund** exists to help meet non-emergency, temporary financial needs of veterans in hardship situations, with the goal of helping veterans in need to achieve self-reliance.

The Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families strives daily to fulfill its mission to a veteran constituency comprising 7.2% of the total adult population of our State (1), as well as to the eligible dependents and survivors of those veterans. We are proud to honor Maryland's veterans by bringing our best to their service every day.

(1) Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs VETPOP2020(veteran population); [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov) (accessed 2/2/2024) (Maryland population 18+ years old).

## *History*

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The Maryland Veterans Commission was created by the General Assembly in 1924. Initially it was charged with the responsibility of providing financial relief to indigent veterans and widows. The Commission's objective remained essentially the same until the beginning of World War II. At that time the Veterans Administration began to recognize the need for providing adequate counsel for veterans in claims before the Veterans Administration. To assist in providing this service, the Veterans Administration provided the Maryland Veterans Commission with free office space in their principal offices.

In 1946, the Veterans Administration eliminated all of their offices serving Maryland except for the regional offices located in Washington D.C. (which housed the claims files for Prince George' and Montgomery Counties) and the Baltimore Regional Office which serviced the veterans' claims for all other counties in Maryland. To fill the void created by the consolidation, increased service had to be provided by the Commission. Today DVMF maintains 15 service offices across the State.

In 1973, the Legislature authorized the beginning of the State Veterans Cemetery Program.

In 1999, the Legislature created the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) as an executive agency with the mission of assisting veterans, active-duty service members, their families and dependents, in securing benefits earned through military service.

In 2006, the Legislature authorized the beginning of the State Veterans Outreach and Advocacy program.

In 2021, Governor Hogan created the Women/Veterans Inclusion Program within MDVA. This initiative aims to raise awareness of the needs of Maryland's women, minority, and underserved veteran populations. Also, in 2021, MDVA identified the site of the State's second veterans home and developed facility plans for this vital capital addition, which will expand our ability to serve those who served.

In 2024, to better represent the communities we serve, our department was renamed Department of Veterans & Military Families (DVMF), reaffirming our dedication to supporting veterans, service members, their families, and caregivers. Additionally, we established a Deputy Secretary position focused on Military Family Policy & Programs, created the Commission on Veterans and Military Families, and designated Maryland's first Veterans Suicide Prevention Day—further underscoring our commitment to addressing critical needs.

## **Demographic Trends Among Veterans**

A projected 352,000 veterans live in Maryland as of 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). According to the USDVA, two segments of the veteran population are growing at annual rates of 3-5%:

1. Veterans over age 75 (accounting for the aging Korea and Vietnam Era Veterans, as well as those of the World War II Era); and
2. Returning veterans

### **Veterans over age 75**

Several unique characteristics affect service needs for these veterans:

- Increase in number of veterans needing long-term assisted living care;
- Presence of wartime disabilities, both physical and mental; and
- Increase in veterans considered medically indigent.

### **Returning Veterans**

Veterans returning from the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have unique needs and characteristics. Maryland has experienced one of the largest mobilizations of "citizen soldiers", those individuals serving in our State National Guard or Armed Forces Reserve Units, in our nation's history. Along with some of Maryland's returning citizen soldiers, a number of veterans of the active duty component will face challenges, including the following:

- Combat wounds;
- Head injuries / Traumatic Brain Injury;
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD);
- Reintegration and transition;
- Employment or re-employment challenges;
- Risk of becoming homeless;
- Significant family readjustment issues following active duty; or
- Long-term care needs.

As service members transition following overseas deployments, many will need assistance with ongoing medical, mental health or reintegration issues. Some may require assistance with re-employment, education or emergency help to overcome a financial crisis. Along with other State agencies committed to veterans' assistance programs, the Maryland Department of Veterans & Military Families is helping veterans to meet these challenges.