

WHEREAS, Maryland has over 10,000 veterans of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, with 5,000 more projected to return by the end of 2008; and

WHEREAS, It is among the highest priorities of the State to ensure that veterans returning from active service have the support, opportunities, and services necessary to facilitate their smooth transition from military to civilian life, and to ease that transition for their families; and

WHEREAS, Among the obstacles returning veterans often face are unmet physical and behavioral health needs arising out of their service; and

WHEREAS, The psychological trauma of the war on terror, the counterinsurgency, and the urban battlefield has put veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq and at particular risk of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and related conditions, which if untreated can lead to life-long struggles with depression, substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness, and suicide; and

WHEREAS, Estimates are that more than half of veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts return from combat zones with behavioral health problems that could compromise their successful adjustment to civilian life; and

WHEREAS, Gaps in the availability of behavioral health services and impediments to veterans' ability to access those services, particularly in the State's rural areas may leave serious health problems untreated and exacerbate the difficulties returning veterans and their families must face; and

WHEREAS, The State is committed to identifying the behavioral health needs and gaps in services that may exist for returning veterans, and to collaborating with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, veterans' organizations, and others to address those needs and ensure that veterans and their families receive the services they require and deserve; now, therefore,

SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND, That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Article - Health - General

SUBTITLE 27. BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR MARYLAND VETERANS OF THE AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ CONFLICTS.

13-2701.

(A) IN THIS SUBTITLE THE FOLLOWING WORDS HAVE THE MEANINGS INDICATED.