

Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service



February 13, 2020

The Hon. Shane E. Pendergrass
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee
House Office Building, Room 215
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Madam Chair:

I am writing to you in support of HB 12, which would change the term “armed forces” to “uniformed services” in Maryland law. We are a non-profit organization incorporated in the State of Maryland in 1951 and located in Prince George’s County. We represent approximately 1300 officers of the US Public Health Service who are resident in Maryland, plus another 3700 who serve elsewhere in our country.

Few people know the history of the USPHS and how its officers have served our country through the years, in all wars our country has fought since 1898 and the war with Spain. Perhaps this historical summary can be shared, as appropriate, with your colleagues who will be considering this legislation.

President Woodrow Wilson’s Executive Order on 3 April 1917 made the USPHS a part of the military forces of the United States during World War I, and USPHS officers were detailed to the Army, Navy, and Coast Guard.

Beginning on 23 December 1941—less than three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor—officers of the USPHS serving on Coast Guard ships and with other Coast Guard units were incorporated into the Naval forces of the United States. During World War II, 663 USPHS officers served as part of the Coast Guard, including serving on four cutters that were lost to enemy action. USPHS doctors were assigned to each of the Army’s Service Commands. Fifteen USPHS officers were assigned to the China-Burma-India theater of war. Others supported the Normandy landings on D-Day in 1944; still others were directly involved in the amphibious landings on Japanese-defended islands in the Pacific theater of war, including Iwo Jima, Saipan, and the Philippines.

A USPHS officer served on the G-5 staff at Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, in Europe with the rank of major general. A PHS officer served on General MacArthur’s staff as an aide-de-camp, while another PHS officer served on the personal staff of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz.

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Five USPHS medical officers serving in the Philippines were taken prisoner by the Japanese, and two of them died in captivity. A total of fourteen USPHS officers died on active duty during WW II, including six who were killed in enemy action. Three USPHS officers were awarded Distinguished Service Medals for their wartime service; seven received Purple Heart Medals; ten received Legions of Merit; and nine were awarded Bronze Star Medals.

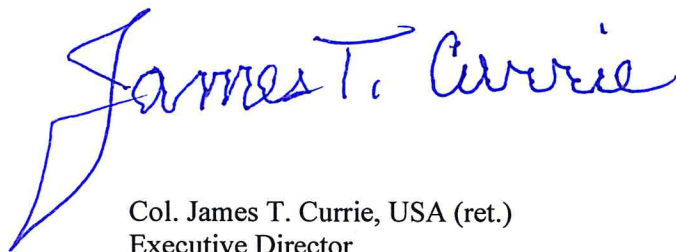
On 21 June 1945, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9575, which declared the "Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service to be a military service and branch of the land and naval forces of the United States during the period of the present war."

At least 171 USPHS officers served in Vietnam on surgical teams and in groups controlling malaria and infectious diseases.

Almost 900 USPHS officers have served with U.S. Military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. USPHS officers have provided medical care to the Coast Guard for more than 200 years, wearing Coast Guard uniforms and serving on Coast Guard cutters and at shore stations. A USPHS officer serves as Surgeon General of the Coast Guard.

USPHS officers are veterans under federal law (42 U.S. Code 213d), entitled to all rights and privileges thereof, including the right to burial in a Veterans Affairs cemetery. They participate fully in the Memorial Day and Veterans Day events at Arlington National Cemetery and regularly march in veterans' parades.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James T. Currie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

Col. James T. Currie, USA (ret.)
Executive Director