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From the Battlefield to the Health Care Field **by Anthony G. Brown and Dana Stein**

There is a crisis in the Maryland job market. It is not the loss of jobs, as you'd expect. Instead, there is a severe shortage of workers in an industry that impacts all of us. That industry is health care, from physicians and pharmacists to nurses and technicians.

Current federal figures show that 10 of the 20 fastest-growing occupations are related to health care. A 2007 study by a state commission found gaps between the projected number of openings and projected number of graduates in 18 health care fields, including emergency medical technicians/paramedics.

Efforts are underway in Maryland to address these shortages. But one source of trained personnel has not been tapped. That group is our servicemen and women with health care experience. Military corpsmen and medics are highly trained individuals. Because of their experience in working with trauma, hospitals view them as a good fit for emergency rooms and intensive care units. They are also a good fit for community health settings, because of the level of independence they are accustomed to.

Though these military jobs require skill and education, they may not match the licensing and certification requirements for civilian health care occupations. The additional clinical training and course work a veteran needs to become credentialed will depend on the health care occupation and the extent of the veteran's training. Moreover, because of the difficulties that veterans with health care experience face in transitioning to comparable civilian jobs, most of these veterans do not remain in Maryland.

During the 2010 legislative session, the General Assembly took action to link veterans with the civilian health care sector. At our initiative, the legislature passed House Bill 1353, which Governor Martin O'Malley signed into law on May 20.

Under this bill, the Maryland Department of Veteran Affairs will prepare a plan to increase the number of veterans, including current and former members of the Reserve forces and National Guard, with expertise in health care workforce shortage areas to transition into civilian health care provider positions. The Department will consult with several state agencies in developing this transition plan, which must be completed by January 1, 2012.

Hospitals, community health care centers, state agencies and professional groups strongly supported the bill. Corpsmen with health care experience on the battlefield spoke about how they would like to enter the health



care field in Maryland. As Hospital Corpsman Master Chief Christopher Santee, who testified in support of the bill, observed, “Navy corpsmen have been trained to provide medical care under a myriad of peacetime and wartime platforms. Unfortunately, Maryland does not have a lateral civilian certification that is in keeping with this skill set. Most certifications are several steps below the skill and capability levels of corpsmen. That’s why Navy corpsmen are looking to other states that have crosswalk training to facilitate the use of these skills in hospital and community settings.”

House Bill 1353 will help address two important needs – providing health care jobs in Maryland for veterans with health care expertise, and helping meet shortages in important health occupations. This initiative makes sense from a health care point of view and an economic point of view – and, it is the right thing to do for our veterans.

Lt. Governor Anthony Brown, a Democrat, is the nation’s highest-ranking elected official to have served a tour of duty in Iraq. He leads the O’Malley-Brown administration’s veterans policy.

Delegate Dana Stein (D-11) was lead sponsor of House Bill 1353. Del. Stein is executive director and founder of Civic Works, a non-profit in Baltimore.