

**Testimony of Jean Athey**  
**To the House Health and Government Operations Committee**  
**March 11, 2009**  
**HB 907--Public Safety - National Guard Deployment - Governor's Powers**  
**SUPPORT**

My name is Dr. Jean Athey. I am retired now and live in Brookeville, MD. I formerly worked at the National Institute of Mental Health in a program focused on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

National Guard members have the highest rates of mental health problems in the military and the worst access to care.

A DOD study<sup>1</sup> states that 49% of National Guard members report serious mental health symptoms three months after demobilization, the highest of all the services, and up to one in four may experience PTSD. National Guard troops also face much greater risk of alcohol-related problems.<sup>2</sup>

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), which can range from mild to debilitating, is quite common among Iraq veterans, and it is often seen in combination with PTSD.

There are very, very few mental health professionals in the private sector trained to provide treatment for PTSD, and even fewer for PTSD complicated by TBI. Essentially none of those who can provide such treatment are available outside of a military treatment facility, such as Bethesda Naval Hospital.

Our Maryland Guard troops go home to their communities when demobilized—to Salisbury, Easton, Cumberland. There, they won't find the highly-trained mental health providers they need, and frequent travel to Bethesda is not feasible for most. The DOD report states that veterans and family members give up trying to find appropriate services after "the tenth or eleventh" unsuccessful phone call for an appointment.<sup>3</sup>

We are sending our young Guard members into situations that not only may kill or dismember them. They also face a 50% chance of soul-destroying emotional damage, and there is no viable system of care to help them.

I don't believe the National Guard was established to be a first-line military service, as it has been used in Iraq and Afghanistan. But if we do decide to send our Maryland Guard to war, the least we can do is be absolutely certain that the deployment orders are legal and constitutional. That's all this legislation asks.

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<sup>1</sup>An Achievable Vision, Report of the DOD Task Force on Mental Health, June 2007, <http://www.health.mil/dhb/mhtf/MHTF-Report-Final.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>Isabel Jacobsen, et al., "Alcohol Use and Alcohol-Related Problems Before and After Military Combat Deployment," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 300 (6) 663-675, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>An Achievable Vision, *ibid*.