

TESTIMONY of Robert H. Cooke  
18308 Winter Park Court, Gaithersburg, MD 20879-4626  
Health and Government Operations Committee Hearing  
HB907--Public Safety - National Guard Deployment - Governor's Powers  
SUPPORT - March 11, 2009

Good Afternoon. My name is Bob Cooke. I live in Gaithersburg, MD in District 39. I am proud to say that two of my state delegates are co-sponsors of HB907.

I am also proud to be here today, both as an individual citizen, and an active member of many peace organizations, including many groups which have a religious underpinning. I am the President of the Pax Christi Metro DC and Baltimore regional council, the main Catholic peace organization, as well as being active in groups such as Christian Peace Witness For Iraq, Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership, and many other religious and secular peace groups.

My colleagues, Michael Keller and Fran Pollner – in her written testimony, have done a great job in covering many of the emergency preparedness related reasons for bringing the Guard home. I want to briefly touch on some of these reasons, but I mainly wanted to also mention that “emergency preparedness” also means trying to help alleviate the family and community emergencies that our National Guard neighbors and their families have been facing these past seven years; and to provide checks and balances on improper use of a cherished state asset, our National Guard, when they are not being used correctly.

Bringing the Maryland National Guard Home is a true family value. We did not hear as much about family values in the most recent election compared to years past. Ending six plus years of Maryland National Guard members, and their families, having to brace themselves for the next call up to Iraq, or another overseas battle station, is a family value. These continued call-ups have torn apart many Guard families in Maryland and the rest of the nation. Loss of income, strains on family life, especially for single parent guard persons, and dealing with the physical and emotional effects of war upon returning home are just a few of the negative consequences our Guard neighbors have been facing these past six or seven years.

The Maryland National Guard is needed at home – to take care of their families, work in the community, and help protect us, their neighbors, when any form of disaster happens at home. Floods, fires, hurricanes, ice storms, tornados, as well as non natural disasters, happen every day around the world. Fortunately, there have not been any truly devastating natural disasters since 2003 in Maryland but the odds of our, or another state, needing our National Guard to help protect the homeland in a domestic emergency, grow greater each day. We are not prepared to face a natural, or unnatural, disaster of any magnitude without our full contingent of National Guard being deployed at home.

If state governments do not speak out to protect their Guard and home state, who will? As covered in the written testimony of my colleague, Fran Pollner, we need to help our governor be like NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who in March of 1944, when the legality of the draft was unequivocal, declared that if one more NYC fireman were inducted into service overseas, the city would burn down. His warning carried weight. Those NYC firemen in the midst of the induction process were sent cancellation notices by the Selective Service System, and no others were called upon for the duration of the war. This bill would give Governor O'Malley, and future Maryland governors, not only the moral imperative that they, and local leaders like Mayor LaGuardia, al-

ready have, but also the legal basis to make such a rightful protest against excessive use of citizen guards serving overseas, when they are needed at home and there is no federal military authorization to keep them overseas. As Ms. Pollner also indicates in her written testimony, without the additional legislative language that we are asking for, a Maryland request similar to that made by Wyoming Governor Brian Schweitzer in 2005 to keep their Guard home, in anticipation of a particularly fierce wildfire season, would also likely be ignored.

Our form of government is based on checks and balances. If any sector of the government goes unchecked, bad things can happen, as we have seen many times, especially at the federal level, during the past seven years, but also at the state level. You will also be voting this session on a bill to rein in civil liberty abuses by the MD state police in spying on some of our Maryland neighbors, whose only “crime” was to carry out their civic duty in trying to make Maryland a better place to live.

There are not many ways that state governments can provide effective checks and balances on the federal government but the bill you are considering is one such way. It gives the governor of Maryland the authority to stand up to the federal government when there is not a proper Congressional military mandate to authorize the President to use the Maryland National Guard in a foreign war, such as the situation which exists today in regard to Iraq, and which could happen at any time in any other part of the world.

We call on the Maryland House of Delegates, and this committee, to be a good neighbor to our fellow Marylanders, both the National Guards persons and all of the rest of us, who need their protection and presence at home, by voting in favor of this bill.