

**Testimony of Michael Keller**  
**Board chair, Peace Action Education Fund**  
**To the House Health and Government Operations Committee**  
**March 11, 2009**  
**HB 907 – Public Safety – National Guard Deployment – Governor’s Powers**

*SUPPORT*

I am here this afternoon in support of HB 907. My remarks will reflect my concern about the ability of Maryland’s National Guard to respond to domestic emergencies while so many of its members and resources are abroad.

According to its own estimates, the Maryland Army National Guard has only half of the equipment and just two-thirds of the materials that it requires for front-line homeland security. The massive deployments of our National Guard units and resources overseas threaten our state’s civil defense and its capacity to tackle natural disasters and disturbances in our own communities.

Maryland is not alone in facing this problem. A report by the U.S. General Accounting Office found that “the high use of the National Guard for federal overseas missions has reduced equipment available for its state-led domestic missions, at the same time it faces an expanded array of threats at home.” Retired Marine Corps Maj. Gen. Arnold Punaro, chairman of the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, told Congress two years ago that “we are putting our citizens at greater risk and our economy at greater risk” by relegating homeland defense to a backseat role.

A shortfall in the number of well-trained citizen soldiers and up-to-date equipment matter. Serious questions have been raised about the impact that the absence of Guard personnel and equipment had on the ability of Kansas officials to deal with a tornado that devastated a community in that state in 2006 and on the capacity of state and local governments in Louisiana and Mississippi to handle the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Louisiana Guard commanders cited the shortage of troops and the absence of adequate communication and transportation equipment as a major impediment in responding to the hurricane.

The need for Guard resources at home is likely to grow. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, addressing the Senate Armed Services Committee just a couple of months ago, noted that the “man-days” that National Guard members devoted to homeland emergencies increased by almost 60 percent in the past year. Extreme weather patterns and conditions brought about by climate change may lead to even greater demand in the future. Natural and other calamities are unpredictable, but we would be irresponsible to ignore the potential dangers.

Governor O’Malley has joined Sens. Mikulski and Cardin in publicly expressing concern about our Guard’s ability to protect our communities from disasters because of budget and equipment shortfalls. In HB 907, the Maryland General Assembly has the opportunity to send a strong, proactive message that the security of our citizens requires us to bring our Guard home now.