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Good Afternoon,

I hope this message finds you well. Please see the attached written testimony for tonight's council meeting. Thank you for your time and assistance.

Semper Fidelis,

Juan

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Howard County Council Testimony

Juan Valdez

Good evening, Chair, Councilmembers, and members of the public. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight.

I'll keep this under three minutes. I'm Dominican, not Colombian—but like Colombian coffee, I'll try to keep this strong and to the point.

My name is Juan Valdez, and I'm here regarding my appointment to the Howard County Commission for Veterans and Military Families.

I'm a U.S. Marine infantryman, a father, and a working-class immigrant from the Dominican Republic. I care deeply about this work because I've lived it—from combat to coming home.

I was awarded a Purple Heart, and after nearly losing my life, I volunteered to deploy again—to Iraq and then Afghanistan. I share that not for recognition, but to be clear about something: service didn't stop when things got hard. It became part of who I am.

That same mindset is what drives my work today.

I've spent years being open about my own mental health journey, not because it's easy, but because too many veterans feel like they have to struggle quietly. I've dedicated my life to helping veterans overcome the barriers that keep them from getting care—confusing systems, stigma, long waits, and the feeling that asking for help makes you weak.

I already listen to veterans every day. When I see a veteran out in the community, I introduce myself, check in, and connect them to services if I can. That's not part of a job description—that's just how I live.

Professionally, I've worked on Capitol Hill and alongside policymakers at the local, state, and national levels, helping veterans not only access care but also push policy forward so their experiences lead to real change.

At my core, I'm driven by mission accomplishment and a responsibility to stand up for others—especially my veteran brothers and sisters. This country gave me opportunities I never would have had otherwise, and service is how I give back.

If confirmed, I don't see this role as symbolic. I see it as a continuation of the work I'm already doing—listening, advocating, and helping make systems work better.

I don't believe veteran suicide is inevitable. I believe it's preventable—when communities show up, take care of one another, and refuse to let veterans feel alone.

Through this Commission, and through this community, I know we can do better.

Thank you for your time and consideration.