

**Written Testimony on Appointment to the Howard County Veterans Commission  
Submitted by Kelly Kesler  
November 18, 2019**

Thank you, Councilman Ball, and members of the County Council for allowing me to speak this evening. My name is Kelly Kesler and I am a resident of District 2. It is an honor to be considered for an appointment to the Commission for Veterans and Military Families.

Professionally, I am fortunate to serve my community as the Director of the Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition under the leadership of the Health Department. Protecting, promoting and preserving the health of our community is the mission I work toward each day in that role. In past positions I have also had the privilege of working toward Veteran Scholarship Development and the University of Maryland's designation as a recognized Center of Veteran Student Success.

I have been a resident of Howard County for over thirty years. My husband and I are both very proud graduates of Oakland Mills High School and the parents of three children. Our oldest is a graduate of both Long Reach High School and Howard Community College and is currently a junior at Towson University. Our younger children are products of an amazing Title I elementary school and are currently in the sixth and seventh grades at a local middle school.

My family tree spans decades of service across all five military branches. I was raised by a Marine, who enlisted for his service in Vietnam. Having received two Purple Hearts, he returned home where he met my Mother to whom he has been married for the past 52 years. At the age of 17, I had only seen my father cry once. The second time I saw him cry, I was a junior in high school. After coming home from choir rehearsal one night, I found my Dad sitting silently on the sofa with tears in his eyes as he watched news coverage of the first soldiers arriving home from the Persian Gulf. He explained how thankful he was that people had learned from the past. It was the first time he spoke to me about his service and what his return home had been like. It was a door opening to my own understanding of how much his experiences had impacted the values with which my siblings and I were raised. 50 years later he is again facing the loss of his Marine brothers, this time from service-related cancers.

Coincidentally, two months after that night, the man that I would marry many years later left for Basic Training. My husband, Parks, served 23 years as a US Army Reservist. He now lives with a service-connected disease so bizarre most people can't pronounce it and many doctors haven't even heard of it. After supporting the 1st Cavalry for a year in a place affectionately referred to as "*Mortar-itaville*," he began the long and challenging process of returning to civilian life, completing his degree, raising a family, obtaining a diagnosis and navigating the VA system. My husband's medical discharge from service, meant not only the loss of his military career, but also his civilian position which was service-contingent. Today, he continues to fight a life-threatening disease, yet he goes to work each day as a civilian on Ft. Meade. He is an amazing Dad; a loving husband; and, he still always smiles kindly at the people who, probably without realizing his experiences, joke how easy he must have had it as a "*weekend warrior*."

Our family's experience is not unique from that of many others. Military families help others because that service aides in all our collective resilience. If appointed to the Commission, I would be both honored and humbled to serve in this way. Again, I thank you all for your consideration and I appreciate your commitment to the residents of our County.