



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF  
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

101 N. 14<sup>TH</sup> ST., 17<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
RICHMOND, VA 23219

*Air Force Association*  
*American Legion*  
*AMVETS*  
*Association of the United States Army*  
*Disabled American Veterans*  
*Fifth Baptist Veterans Ministry*  
*Fleet Reserve Association*  
*Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America*  
*Korean War Veterans Association*  
*Legion of Valor of the U.S., Inc.*  
*Marine Corps League*  
*Military Order of the Purple Heart*  
*Military Officers Association of America*  
*Military Order of the World Wars*  
*Navy Mutual Aid Association*  
*Navy Seabee Veterans of America*  
*Non-Commissioned Officers Association*  
*Paralyzed Veterans of America*  
*Reserve Officers Association*  
*Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*  
*Veterans of Foreign Wars*  
*Vietnam Veterans of America*  
*Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association*  
*Virginia National Guard Association*  
*Women Marines Association*

October 30, 2020

The Honorable Senator Bryce Reeves  
P. O. Box 7021  
Fredericksburg Virginia 22404

Re: Request your support in amending the Code of Virginia related to VSO Honor Guards, Color Guards, and Rifle Teams

Dear Senator Reeves:

During the 2020 session of the Virginia General Assembly a bill was passed and signed into law that may impact the ability of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) to provide funeral honors for deceased veterans or to provide color guards or rifle teams for a variety of military ceremonies and observances.

We are concerned that the legislation will inadvertently criminalize VSO honor guards, color guards, or rifle teams as they perform their duties, which are focused on providing a dignified final salute to our veterans or thanking and recognizing the contributions that veterans and military service made in the service of our country at public ceremonies.

The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) requests your assistance in revising the Code of Virginia to ensure our VSO honor guards, color guards, and rifle teams, which are comprised of volunteers from VSOs across the Commonwealth, are exempted from any inadvertent impact of the new statute.

The statute in question is §18.2-433.2 of the Code of Virginia, which specifies that any person is guilty of unlawful paramilitary activity punishable as a Class 5 felony, if he:

- “1. Teaches or demonstrates to any other person the use, application, or making of any firearm....
2. Assembles with one or more persons for the purpose of training with, practicing with, or being instructed in the use of any firearm....

3. Violates subsection A of § [18.2-282](#) while assembled with one or more persons for the purpose of and with the intent to intimidate any person or group of persons.”

Further, §18.2-282 states:

“A. It shall be unlawful for any person to point, hold or brandish any firearm ... whether capable of being fired or not, in such a manner as to reasonably induce fear in the mind of another or hold a firearm .... in a public place in such a manner as to reasonably induce fear in the mind of another of being shot or injured..... Persons violating the provisions of this section shall be guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor .....”

Our concern is that a VSO honor guard, color guard, or rifle team member may be inadvertently identified as a member of a paramilitary organization and held liable for inducing fear in another person while displaying or firing volleys at a veteran’s funeral or other ceremony, or even a VSO color guard or rifle team participating in a local parade or other ceremony.

At its October 21, 2020 meeting, the JLC voted unanimously to request your help in amending these statutes to exempt Veterans Service Organizations from provisions or §§18.2-282 and 18.2-433.2 of the Code of Virginia.

Our point of contact is Mr. James Barrett of the Marine Corps League. He may be reached at [jbarrett1966usmc@gmail.com](mailto:jbarrett1966usmc@gmail.com).

Thank you for your service to our Nation and to Virginia’s service members, veterans, and their families.

Sincerely,



William B. Ashton

Chairman

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

Cc: The Honorable Carlos Hopkins  
Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs

John Maxwell  
Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services