

My name is Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, SSG U.S. Army (Ret) and on behalf of PA veterans registered as independent voters, I am here to testify in support of HB 1369. When I chose to join the Army, it was at my will. I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my father, grandfathers, uncles, and cousin, to take the oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. Knowing the sacrifices, myself, family and fellow veterans have made and the lengths we would go to honor the oath is beyond fathomable for most.

After dedicating 13 years to military service before a medical retirement in 2015, I choose to continue my post-service career working to improve the lives of veterans after their service. I have worked with homeless veterans in a shelter setting, assisted veterans with access to healthcare and support services and in my current role as Executive Director of Veteran & Military Services at a university in the Lehigh Valley. Here, I assist veterans with their transition and in the search for their post-military purpose using the GI Bill and other veteran benefits. I am also involved with many community organizations. I am currently serving as the vice-chair of the Veteran and Military Council of the Greater Lehigh Valley Chamber of Commerce, the Governor's Advisory Council on Veteran Services and serve as a constable for elections for the past 8 years.

All these roles have provided me with the opportunity to speak with many independent voters and veterans alike. Both groups feeling disenfranchised by the continuance of closed primary elections. Every primary election, I find myself having to explain that registered independents cannot vote in the primary. This is much harder to explain and justify to veterans. It's like telling a veteran, "Thank you for your service...but not enough thanks for your voice to be heard during

a primary election, come back in the Fall.” You must follow the orders of the Commander in Chief, but you cannot select the one you want to see on the ballot. The many sacrifices you have made, missed holidays and birthdays, weddings, births, and funerals, what’s one more sacrifice, the one where you get your full right to vote. Support and defend the Constitution for everyone, but if you live in PA and registered as independent, you don’t get to vote for those to represent you, you must leave that to the two parties to decide. In this divisive political climate we find ourselves in, I would choose to be registered as an independent, but I will not sacrifice my right to vote in both the Primary and General elections.

In the words of Abraham Lincoln, to honor the sacrifices – including death – soldiers made in defense of democracy, “Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from this earth.” Honor that saying by allowing independent veteran voters the right to vote in all elections. The oath we take is not sewn on the inside of our uniform as a reminder, it is at our core and cannot be removed when we take the uniform off.