

February 2, 2023

SENATE BILL NO. 1388
(First Reprint)

To the Senate:

Pursuant to Article V, Section I, Paragraph 14 of the New Jersey Constitution, I am returning Senate Bill No. 1388 (First Reprint) with my recommendations for reconsideration.

This bill would task the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs ("DMAVA" or "Department") with establishing a pro bono legal representation program within the Department. The purpose of the program is to provide pro bono legal representation to active-duty service members and veterans of the military in various areas of civil law, including employment law, estate planning, and family law.

Military service members often face civil legal issues that create various obstacles to their health and financial stability. I fully support ensuring service members are aware of available resources and can readily access them, including legal representation, especially in times of need. I commend the bill's sponsors for recognizing that our service members should be able to obtain representation from experienced attorneys in a variety of areas of law on a pro bono basis.

However, I am concerned that the bill as currently drafted cannot be implemented effectively. DMAVA does not have the capacity to identify attorneys in different areas of the law, as that is not within the Department's area of expertise. The Department does, though, have the ability to provide information relating to the broad range of pro bono legal services already in existence that are available to assist active-duty service members and veterans.

I recommend amending the language in the bill to reflect that DMAVA will obtain and publish information about programs and organizations that can provide pro bono legal representation in

areas of civil law, allowing our service members to readily access information regarding pro bono legal service providers.

Therefore, I herewith return Senate Bill No. 1388 (First Reprint) and recommend that it be amended as follows:

- Page 2, Section 1, Line 7: Delete in its entirety
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 8: Delete "New Jersey's" and insert "The"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 8: Delete "to" and insert "shall"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 9: After "provide" insert "information to"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 11: After "military" insert "about available programs and organizations that provide"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 12: After "representation" insert "to active-duty members and veterans"
- Page 2, Section 1, Line 15: After "law." insert "The Department shall make this information, which shall include a list of participating pro bono legal service providers, including law firms or attorneys, available on its website."
- Page 2, Section 2, Lines 17-20: Delete in their entirety
- Page 2, Section 3, Line 22: Delete "3." and insert "2."

[seal]

Respectfully,

/s/ Philip D. Murphy

Governor

Attest:

/s/ Parimal Garg

Chief Counsel to the Governor