



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

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## TESTIMONY OF DR. LINDA S. SCHWARTZ, COMMISSIONER,

Department of Veterans' Affairs

Submitted to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs

February 19, 2009

### HB 6394: AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF FUND

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am pleased to offer this written testimony on Governor's bill HB 6394, *An Act Concerning the Military Family Relief Fund*, which would expand the eligibility of the Military Family Relief Fund to the immediate family members of any member of the armed forces who is domiciled in the state, including Connecticut National Guard members and Reservists from all services, who have a demonstrated financial hardship. This legislation would remove the current restriction which limits eligibility to Guard and Reserve families only during the period their soldier is away on active duty.

The Military Family Relief Fund, administered by the Connecticut Military Department, awards grants to the immediate family members of eligible, currently-serving service members to help pay for essential personal or household goods or services including, but not limited to, repairs, medical services that are not covered by insurance, transportation, babysitting, clothing, school supplies or any other goods or services that are essential to the well-being of a the family. Grant applications are reviewed and processed within seven days of receipt.

Although the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs has no role in the administration of this valuable Fund, we recognize the Military Family Relief Fund as another important state program to help many families of currently-serving service members – the majority of whom are also

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veterans. These are difficult times for military and veterans' families. Our National Guardsmen and Reservists are supplying critical manpower for the Global War on Terror and are shouldering more than their fair share of the nation's wartime burden. Multiple deployments are taking their toll both on the individual veterans and their families left behind. Often, financial pressures associated with the veteran's deployment(s) can add a great deal to the stress of these transitions.

Those financial pressures often do not end when the veteran returns home and comes off active duty. In fact, the transition period following redeployment is often the most stressful and challenging for the veteran and his/her family. Often veterans must adjust to a sudden loss or reduction of income upon returning home: many veterans have health issues that may limit their ability to immediately return to their previous civilian jobs; there may be a delay or employee issues preventing their return to their civilian jobs; benefits and services provided to the family based on the active duty status of the service member are no longer available; and bills or financial issues not appropriately addressed during their deployment may quickly surface. This legislation will enable the Military Family Relief Fund to appropriately help these families of service members who continue to serve whenever the need arises.

Taxpayers contribute to the Military Family Relief Fund through a check-off on their state income tax returns and these funds are managed by the State Treasurer. It is my understanding that because of the generosity of the Connecticut people, the Military Family Relief Fund has been receiving annual revenues from this tax return check-off that exceed application needs and that there is sufficient projected revenue to support this expanded eligibility for many years to come. Additionally, the administrative overhead to manage this Fund is extremely small as required by statute.

This self-supporting Fund is another example of smart, efficient government working for the benefit of veterans and their families. Thank you for your consideration of this bill's merits.