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TESTIMONY OF DR. LINDA S. SCHWARTZ, COMMISSIONER,
Department of Veterans' Affairs
Submitted to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs
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**HB 846: AN ACT CONCERNING THE DISABLED VETERANS' PROPERTY
TAX EXEMPTION**

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 846, *An Act Concerning the Disabled Veterans' Property Tax Exemption*, which makes efficient changes to the statutes governing tax assessors and property tax exemptions granted to the state's approximately 22,000 veterans who have a disability rating as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA). Under this change, a disabled veteran who has submitted proof of disability rating to the tax assessor of his/her municipality and has had this exemption granted by the municipal assessor, does not need to resubmit such proof in subsequent years, unless the disability rating is modified by the VA.

This statutory change is necessary to help disabled veterans apply for and maintain their local property tax exemptions and to simplify procedures both for veterans and local tax assessors. Last summer, the VA's Central Office in Washington implemented a new computer/software system which changed some of its previous capabilities to issue correspondence directly to disabled veterans. Disabled veterans had been receiving annual letters from the VA attesting to the continuation of their disability rating for the purposes of submitting these as proof to assessors of continued eligibility for the property tax exemption as required by statute. When the VA Regional Office notified us in the fall they would no longer be able to generate these certification letters to Connecticut's disabled

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veterans, local tax assessors were legally forced to suspend approval of individual property tax exemptions until such letter of proof was received. Although we were able to develop a one-time work around with the VA Regional Office to generate letters to the state's disabled veterans, this issue highlighted to need to modify this cumbersome statute.

This legislative fix will allow municipal tax assessors to continue to grant the disabled veterans property tax exemption for every year following the initial qualification for this benefit without annual verification of the veteran's continued disability. Disabled veterans would be responsible to notify his/her municipal assessor if the VA modifies their disability rating.

In my experience, once a veteran has received a disability rating from the VA, the most frequent modification is to increase the amount of the disability rating, not to decrease it. Although it is possible, rarely do disabled veterans completely lose their disability rating.

This bill will reduce the workload for local assessors and remove a redundant and unnecessary annual filing as a burden of proof from disabled veterans. This bill is a small but important step towards more efficient government regarding access to veterans' benefits. Thank you for your consideration of its merits.