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STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
287 West Street
Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067

TESTIMONY OF DR. LINDA S. SCHWARTZ, COMMISSIONER, Department of Veterans' Affairs Before the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs February 3, 2009

HB 5664: AN ACT CONCERNING THE AWARD OF RIBBONS AND MEDALS TO CERTAIN VETERANS FOR SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR

Good Afternoon, Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am Dr. Linda S. Schwartz, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. I am pleased to offer testimony today on the impact of expanding the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal Program to the families of all deceased wartime veterans and certain foreign nationals as proposed in HB 5664.

As you know, Connecticut has a rich history of recognizing its citizens who have answered the call of war dating back to the Civil War when the state struck and issued its first wartime service medal. This proud tradition was sustained for all wars up through World War I when, for some unknown reason, it unfortunately fell off.

The current Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal was established as a result of Public Act 05-3 (June Special Session) to help restore that important tradition. The legislation required the Commissioner of Veterans' Affairs, in conjunction with the Adjutant General, to establish regulations establishing a program to award a ribbon and medal to qualified wartime veterans from World War II to the present who lived in Connecticut when they were called to active duty service or are now residents.

Public Act 08-87 extended the eligibility for the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal to otherwise qualified veterans who died on or after July 1, 2005. This date corresponds to when the medal was first authorized by the General Assembly.

Since early 2006, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs has proudly issued nearly 21,000 Wartime Service Medals to qualified veterans through a combination of direct mailing and personalized presentation ceremonies. This represents approximately 11% of the total estimated 186,934 eligible wartime veterans still living in Connecticut.

Using statistics from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA), HB 5664 would, at a minimum, double the eligibility pool for the current Wartime Service Medal to the families of another 187,588 deceased wartime veterans who recorded Connecticut as their home of record at the time of separation from the Armed Forces.

In addition, this bill would include wartime veterans who declared Connecticut as their residence at the time of death. The USVA is unable to determine the additional number of wartime deceased veterans from World War II forward who would be eligible based on their Connecticut residency at the time of death. This is likely to be a very large population, covering all veterans who died in Connecticut from December 7, 1941 to the present.

HB 5664 also requires medals to be awarded to living or deceased Foreign Nationals recognized by the USVA as wartime veterans. We cannot estimate the number of eligible deceased wartime veterans from other nations who entered the military from Connecticut or who died in Connecticut.



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When Public Act 05-03 was passed, biennial funding to the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs to support the recurring costs of operating this program were not envisioned or provided for. The initial costs of designing and producing the initial 280,000 medals were funded out of an existing "military assistance account" controlled by the Military Department. The Military Department transferred to us in Fiscal Year 2007 the final available program funding of \$84,895 to assist us with mailing and processing expenses, effectively closing out the initial start-up funding.

The Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs has never been funded in its budget for the personnel and operating costs to support this increasingly popular program. We have had to reassign and dedicate 1.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff members to process medals applications, respond to inquiries and help organize public ceremonies at an estimated annual cost in personnel funding of \$52,727 this year. The dedication of these limited staff resources to this program obviously means that other services to veterans are sometimes delayed. The complexities of administering a posthumous wartime services medal program, including dealing with new documentation requirements and multiple family members, will certainly be much greater than the existing program. In the event the General Assembly chooses to support the additional requirements of HB5664, we would respectfully request the necessary personnel services funding to support two new clerical positions – for a total of 3 FTE staff positions – to be dedicated to the Wartime Services Medal Program at an estimated annual cost of \$102,161 per year in total salaries.

Our agency has also implemented substantial enhancements and efficiencies to the medals program based on feedback from the Connecticut veterans' community. All recipients now receive an attractive, personalized certificate along with their medals and those wartime service medals which are mailed are delivered in a professional package which includes the medal on a presentation card, the personalized certificate, and a letter from the Governor as State Commander-in-Chief. In order to

save staff resources, we have contracted with an outside company to print, assemble and mail these personalized medal packages at an average cost of \$5 per medal. This fiscal year we estimate we will re-direct existing agency resources to spend over \$108,000 on printing, mailing, assembly and records storage costs to support the current wartime services medal program.

In conclusion, HB 5664 would clearly add new budgetary pressures to this currently unfunded program and the agency overall. It is impossible to predict the level of interest by families in posthumous medals awards but as outlined, the exposure could be significant. Based on our current level of issuing approximately 10,000 medals to living veterans per year and a conservative estimate of another 3,500 posthumous medals to the families of veterans, we estimate the total costs of this program for the upcoming FY10-11 biennium to be approximately \$385,000 (see enclosure).

As a Vietnam Veteran and long-time veterans' advocate, I certainly support the concept behind this well-meaning proposal. I have spent my life honoring veterans and I am moved every time I am able to present a Connecticut Wartime Service Medal to one of our veterans. However, in this time of tight budgets, the funding which would be required to properly support this program must be carefully balanced against other pressing needs. In the event the Committee supports this legislation, for the sake of clarity, I would recommend limiting the eligibility for posthumous medals to the start of America's official entry in World War II, December 7, 1941.

Thank you for your continued interest in and support of Connecticut's veterans. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.

Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs
War Time Service Medal Deployment Plan and Budget FY10-15
 Including Additional Costs per proposed HB 5664
 Projected as of 02-02-2009

Fiscal Year	Personal Services	Printing & Mailing	Equipment	Total Projected Yearly Cost	Estimated # of living service medals to be deployed	Estimated # of posthumous wartime service medals to be deployed	# of medals available
	3.0 FTE*	Include costs of certificates/ letters, processing, and mailing	Additional computer setups and fire proof secured cabinets		VA 2007 statistics of 186,934 CT Vets	VA 2007 statistics of 187,588 deceased vets in CT	245,000 end of FY09
FY10	102,161.58	76,000.00	14,000.00	192,161.58	10300	3500	231200
FY11	107,269.66	86,526.00		193,795.66	11330	3850	217700
FY12	112,633.14	98,509.85	4,000.00	215,142.99	12463	4236	204200
FY13	118,264.80	112,153.47		230,418.26	13709	4659	190700
FY14	124,178.04	127,686.72	4,200.00	256,064.76	15080	5124	177200
FY15	130,386.94	145,371.33		275,758.27	16588	5637	163700
Total	694,894.16	646,247.37	22,200.00	1,363,341.53	79471	27005	

*Personnel services costs based on annual costs of three (3) clerical FTEs

Medals Distribution By Year to Date (As of 11/1/09)

Year	# of Medals
FY06	2841
FY07	5463
FY08	7804
FY09	5142**
Total	20,750

(**10,300 Projected as of 7/1/09)