



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

Testimony Submitted to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
February 19, 2009

M. JODI RELL  
GOVERNOR

*M. Jodi Rell*  
*Governor*  
*State of Connecticut*

**Testimony Supporting H.B. No. 6394: An Act Concerning The Military Family Relief Fund and  
S.B. No. 846: An Act Concerning The Disabled Veterans' Property Tax Exemption**

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Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs, I thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 6394: An Act Concerning The Military Family Relief Fund and Senate Bill No. 846: An Act Concerning The Disabled Veterans' Property Tax Exemption.

As you know, the Military Family Relief Fund was established in 2005 to assist residents of our state who may be experiencing a financial hardship due to a loved one's military service. Since then, grants to Connecticut's military families from the proceeds of this fund have assisted them in making mortgage or utility payments and in paying for home and automobile repairs.

Although many of the financial hardships associated with military service manifest themselves only after a service member returns home, only families of those serving on active duty may qualify for assistance from the Military Family Relief Fund. House Bill 6394 rectifies this dichotomy by allowing for the provision of assistance to families of service members who, though no longer serving on active duty, are experiencing financial difficulties.

In addition to being financed with state moneys, the Military Family Relief Fund is one of the designated charities to which Connecticut taxpayers may contribute by donating all or a portion of their state income tax refunds. Our state's taxpayers have been very generous in making such donations. As a result, I believe the resources of the Military Family Relief Fund are sufficient to allow for this extension of assistance, and I urge you to support H.B. No. 6394.

The need for Senate Bill No. 846 is due to the United States Veterans Administration's conversion to a new payment system (VETSNET). Under the prior system, the federal agency issued VA Form 20-5455, "Statement from Benefit Payment Records" on an annual basis to veterans with disabilities. These veterans submitted that documentation to assessors so as to substantiate eligibility for their property tax exemptions under §12-81(20) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Under VETSNET, VA Form 20-5455 is no longer available. Instead, at the request of a veteran the federal agency will issue a letter that will contain information concerning the veteran's percent of disability rating. Essentially, the United States Veterans Administration is changing from an automatic notification system to one that requires veterans to request documentation on an annual basis. There is a greater likelihood that veterans could neglect to request the documentation they need, or that there will be delays in the provision of letters, especially while the federal agency is converting hundreds of thousands of records to VETSNET.

I believe that requiring our disabled veterans to annually request such a letter places an unnecessary burden on them. For that reason I support Senate Bill No. 846, which will allow a disabled veteran to file proof of exemption eligibility only once, unless there is a change in the veteran's percent of disability. Although instances of the United States Veterans Administration changing a veteran's disability rating are rare, they do occur. If the United States Veterans Administration modifies a veteran's disability rating, Senate Bill No. 846 would require the veteran to reestablish eligibility on the basis of the revised rating.

I know that each of you appreciates the sacrifices of our military families and our veterans. I trust that you will support these bills as a means of recognizing those sacrifices and making life a little easier for them. Please do not hesitate to contact my office with any questions you may have. Thank you.