



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

March 16, 2011

2011-R-0124

VETERANS' BENEFITS

By: Joseph Holstead, Associate Analyst

You asked for information on state veterans' benefits. This report updates OLR report [2006-R-0099](#).

SUMMARY

State law defines a "veteran" in several ways with some statutes defining a veteran especially for a particular benefit program. In the absence of a specific definition, eligibility is determined according to a general definition in [CGS § 27-103](#). This law defines a veteran as an individual honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions from active duty in the armed forces.

Veterans who served at least 90 days on active duty in the U.S. Armed Forces during a time of war, however, are eligible for a range of benefits not available to those without wartime service.

At a minimum, wartime veterans are eligible for:

1. local property tax exemptions (a reduction of the property's assessed value for tax purposes);
2. education benefits, including tuition waivers at the state's public colleges and universities;

3. financial aid from the Soldiers', Sailors' and Marines' Fund and the veterans' affairs commissioner;
4. employment benefits, including bonus points on initial civil service examinations;
5. retirement benefits;
6. motor vehicle registration and license fee exemptions; and
7. other miscellaneous benefits.

All veterans, including those without wartime service, are eligible for miscellaneous benefits, including admission to the Veterans' Home; burial in the state veterans' cemetery; and motor vehicle, employment, occupational licensing, employment, and housing benefits.

Veterans' benefits are not granted automatically. The veteran or his or her qualified dependent must claim them. To make a claim, the applicant must document his or her eligibility. The most common proof of eligibility is the Department of Defense document, DD 214, which must indicate an honorable discharge (in block 24). (All military services have used DD 214s since January 1, 1950, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (<http://www.cem.va.gov/hm/dischdocs.asp>); before then, similar documents were called a "Report of Separation" and a "Certificate of Service.")

A veteran's surviving spouse or dependent children are eligible for some benefits to which the deceased veteran was eligible. The National Archive's website states that "most veterans and their next-of-kin can obtain free copies of their DD Form 214 [or the applicable separation document] and other military and medical records several ways," and provides links to do so: <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/index.html>

For further information on programs and eligibility requirements, veterans may contact the state Veterans' Department Office of Advocacy and Assistance at 1-800-447-0961 and visit the Veterans' Department website: www.state.ct.us/ctva/.

Information on federal benefits for veterans and their families is available by calling the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs at 1-800-827-1000 and visiting its website: http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book.asp

VETERANS' BENEFITS

To qualify for some benefits, service in the time of war is required. Other benefits are available to all veterans honorably discharged from active-duty service, irrespective of whether they served during wartime.

WAR SERVICE BENEFITS

To be eligible for these, a veteran must have at least 90 days wartime service during or in specified wars, operations, or conflicts unless he or she was separated from service sooner because of a Veterans' Administration (VA)-rated, service-connected disability or he served for the duration of any military operation that lasted for less than 90 days.

Property Tax Exemptions

State law provides a basic \$1,000 municipal property tax exemption for qualified veterans ([CGS § 12-81\(19\)](#)). It also provides for an additional mandatory exemption and an additional optional exemption for veterans who qualify for the basic exemption and meet certain income limits or have disabilities. An exemption is a reduction in the property's assessed value on which taxes are owed, not a credit against the amount of the tax. Additional exemption amounts (beyond the basic \$1,000) depend on income, disability, and other factors. (For a more detailed discussion of property tax exemptions for veterans with disabilities, see attached OLR Report [2008-R-0627](#).)

Qualifying. In addition to those meeting the general 90-day active-duty during war and honorable discharge requirement, those still in the service are eligible if they meet the 90-day war service requirement, as are veterans who retired after 30 years of service. For World War II, veterans with certain Merchant Marine service and military service with allied armies also qualify. A veteran's spouse is ordinarily entitled to the property tax exemption for which the deceased veteran qualified. A sole surviving parent and the minor child of a veteran who died while serving in the armed forces or after receiving an honorable discharge is also entitled to an exemption ([CGS § 12-81\(19\) to \(25\)](#)).

To obtain an exemption, an applicant must document his or her eligibility to the local town clerk. If the veteran is no longer in service, he or she must establish eligibility only once to receive the basic exemption; if the veteran is still serving, he or she must send the town clerk a written statement every year signed by his or her commanding officer or

other appropriate officer attesting to his or her service. For income-based exemptions, the veteran must reestablish his or her eligibility every two years. Veterans' disability payments are excluded when determining income for an income-based property tax exemption for veterans.

Additional Local Option for All War Service Veterans. [CGS § 12-81f](#) allows towns to provide a property tax exemption in addition to the veterans' exemptions they are required to provide by law. The exemption can be up to \$10,000 or 10% of a property's assessed value for eligible veterans, whichever is greater. Towns can increase the maximum income a veteran or a surviving spouse can have and be eligible for the exemption by as much as \$25,000 above the income levels of the mandatory exemption program. The state does not reimburse towns for revenue they lose as a result of providing the optional exemption.

Education Benefits

Tuition Waivers. The law requires the state's public colleges and universities to waive tuition for wartime veterans who have been accepted at an approved institution. The waiver applies at community-technical colleges, Connecticut State University, and the University of Connecticut. It covers the cost of tuition for credit-bearing undergraduate and graduate programs. It does not apply to other charges or fees, such as student activity fees and room and board.

A veteran's dependent children also qualify for a tuition waiver if the veteran is declared missing in action or a prisoner of war while serving in the armed forces after January 1, 1960. The child must have been accepted to the institution.

Educational Financial Aid for Certain Children. The law provides state education aid to veterans' children between ages 16 and 23 if the veteran was killed in action, died from an illness or accident while on active duty, or is totally and permanently disabled. The amount of aid, which is based on need, is up to \$400 per year ([CGS § 10a-166](#)).

Honorary High School Diplomas. Local or regional school boards may award high school diplomas to honorably discharged World War II veterans who did not receive their diplomas because they left high school for military service ([CGS § 10-221a\(g\)](#)).

Financial and Other Aid

Soldiers', Sailors' and Marines' Fund. This fund provides benefits, such as food, clothing, medical and surgical aid, and general care and relief, or burial expenses to needy wartime veterans or (1) their spouses living with them or who lived with them when they died or (2) their dependent children under age 18. The veteran must live in the state when he applies for, and while getting, the assistance ([CGS § 27-138 et. seq.](#)). Further information on this fund is available at <http://www.state.ct.us/ssmf/> or by calling (860) 953-4345.

Commissioner's Assistance. Wartime veterans who need help because of disability or other service-related cause are eligible for temporary financial assistance from the veterans' affairs commissioner in an amount and for a time she decides. She may also help the spouse, children, or siblings of any veteran who died as a result of such service if they cannot support themselves because of the veteran's death ([CGS § 27-125](#)).

Employment

Civil Service Exams. The law gives bonus points to wartime veterans who achieve a passing score on initial state and municipal civil service examinations. A wartime veteran not eligible for or receiving VA disability compensation or pension payments, and unable to pursue gainful employment because of the disability, receives 10 bonus points; any other wartime veteran ineligible for VA disability compensation or pension gets five bonus points. A qualified veteran's spouse is also eligible ([CGS §§ 5-224](#) and [7-415](#)).

If an honorably discharged or released veteran has served in a military action and received or is entitled to receive a campaign badge or expeditionary medal and is not otherwise eligible to receive bonus points, he or she qualifies for five bonus points if he or she receives the passing grade on the examination ([CGS § 5-224](#)).

Retirement

Members of the Municipal Employees' Retirement System who leave municipal employment to enter the armed forces while the United States is at war, engaged in hostilities, or during national emergencies and are reemployed by the municipality within six months of discharge, are credited with the period of service as though they had been continuously employed. This six-month limitation can be extended in cases of a service-related disability ([CGS § 7-434](#)).

Wartime veterans who become members of the State Employees' Retirement System or Teachers' Retirement System may purchase retirement credit for time of service. The system allows credit for up to 30 months for peacetime military service. Veterans purchasing teachers' retirement credit may not be receiving or eligible to receive retirement credit for service from any other government source ([CGS §§ 5-180 and 10-183e\(b\)\(3\) and \(11\)](#)).

State police officers and correction guards and instructors who were granted military leave and returned to service within 90 days after discharge receive retirement credit for any period of wartime service. They may also get retirement credit for wartime service prior to such employment, provided they make the appropriate contributions to the retirement fund ([CGS § 5-173](#)).

Motor Vehicle Registration Fee Exemptions

The law grants free motor vehicle registration to disabled wartime veterans with certain service-connected disabilities, former prisoners of war, and recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. Disabled veterans are eligible for fee exemptions for up to three vehicles in the (1) passenger; (2) camper; or (3) combination passenger and commercial registration categories, whether the veteran owns or leases them. The other two categories of veterans are eligible for exemptions on two vehicles. The spouses of the recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor and former prisoners of war may retain the registration for life or until remarriage ([CGS §§14-49\(o\) & 14-21d](#)).

Disabled wartime veterans with certain VA-rated disabilities are entitled, upon application, to free special license plates. The plate exempts the veteran from overtime parking fines, provided he does not leave his vehicle at the same spot for more than 24 hours. Surviving spouses may keep the plates and identification cards until death or remarriage ([CGS § 14-254](#)).

Miscellaneous War Service Benefits

Funeral Honor Guards. A veteran is entitled to an honor guard detail at his funeral if he served in wartime or in the National Guard for more than 20 years or died while serving as a guard member ([CGS § 27-76](#)).

Burial Expenses. When any veteran dies and does not leave enough money to pay for burial expenses, as determined by the commissioner after consulting with the appropriate probate court, the state must pay \$150 toward his funeral expenses or cremation. Claims must be made within one year after the veteran dies or his or her remains are returned from abroad ([CGS § 27-118](#)).

Itinerant Vendor Permit Fee Exemptions. Wartime veterans are exempt from the \$200 fee for a town hawker and peddler permit (but not from the requirement to get a permit). The veteran must live in the state for at least two years before he or she qualifies ([CGS § 21-37](#)).

Wartime veterans are entitled to an exemption from any local itinerant vendor's license fee, if they live in Connecticut for two years before applying ([CGS § 21-30](#)).

Veterans' Service Ribbons. The veterans' affairs commissioner, in conjunction with the adjutant general, awards a ribbon and medal to any wartime veteran who lived in Connecticut when called to active duty service or is living in Connecticut when the award is made. The award is called the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal. The law allows posthumous awards to veterans who died on or after January 1, 2000 and requires such posthumous awards to be made within existing budgetary resources. The cost of the ribbons and medals is paid from funds appropriated to the Military Department's military assistance account ([CGS § 27-73e](#)). More information, including how to apply, is available at: <http://www.ct.gov/ctva/cwp/view.asp?a=1992&q=313194>

Bonus Program. By law, current or former guard members called to active service on or after September 11, 2001, are entitled to a service bonus (1) if they are or were in active service for at least 90 consecutive days; (2) if while in such service, they are or were deployed in a combat zone designated by the president; and (3) if discharged, they were discharged honorably or because of a line-of-duty injury. Under a 2005 act, the bonus was \$50 for each month (or major part thereof) of active service after September 11, 2001, up to a maximum of \$500 ([PA 05-3](#), June Special Session). Beginning July 1, 2007, the law increased the maximum bonus for these combat-zone, active-service guard members, by \$700, to \$1,200 ([PA 07-187](#)). It established a \$500 maximum bonus for otherwise qualified current or former guard members whose active service is or was not in a combat zone.

By law, applicants must submit bonus requests within three years after the end of the operation in which they served ([CGS § 27-61a](#)).

Depleted Uranium Exposure Tests. The law requires the adjutant general and the veterans' affairs commissioner to help eligible guard members and veterans get federal treatment services, including a best practice health screening test for exposure to depleted uranium, if they (1) are assigned a risk level I, II, or III for depleted uranium exposure by their branch of service; (2) are referred by a military physician; or (3) have reason to believe that they were exposed to depleted uranium during military service. The best practice test must use (1) a bioassay procedure involving methods sensitive enough to detect depleted uranium at low levels and (2) equipment capable of discriminating between different radioisotopes in naturally occurring levels of uranium and the characteristic ratio and marker for depleted uranium.

The law applies to (1) Connecticut National Guard members who served in the Persian Gulf War or in an area designated as a combat zone by the President during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom and (2) honorably discharged veterans who served as guard members under these same circumstances ([CGS § 27-140ii](#)).

Veterans Health Registry. The law allows the Veterans Affairs' Department to establish and maintain a registry of health data on armed forces members who have completed a period of active service. The department may use the data to (1) study the potential short- and long-term effects of environmental hazards on such members and (2) inform, customize, and coordinate the provision of health care services to them. It must accomplish these tasks using available resources.

The law applies to members of the U. S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, Air Force, and reserves, including guard members performing under federal law. It allows the Veterans Affairs' Department to develop surveys for members or their health care providers voluntarily to provide registry data during or after their period of active service. The surveys and data must be related to members' illnesses and potential correlations between such illnesses and environmental hazards. These hazards include vaccinations, infections, chemicals, pesticides, microwaves, depleted uranium, pyridostigmine bromide, and chemical and biological warfare agents.

The department must collect and maintain the surveys and data in accordance with the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Except for individually identifiable health data, which may be released only with the member's consent in accordance with HIPAA, the registry database information is disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act ([CGS § 27-109a](#)).

BENEFITS NOT REQUIRING WAR SERVICE

Admission to the Veterans' Home

Veterans who need medical or surgical care and treatment are eligible for admission to the Veterans' Home or any other veterans' hospital. Those with no adequate means of support are also eligible for admission to the following Connecticut hospitals at the state's expense: tuberculosis sanatorium, state chronic disease hospital, and mental hospital or training school for the mentally retarded ([CGS §§ 27-108](#) & [27-103\(b\)](#)). The veterans' affairs commissioner has sole power to determine who is admitted to these facilities.

Burial in the State Veterans' Cemetery

Veterans and one spouse are eligible for burial in the state veterans' cemetery ([CGS § 27-122b](#)).

Education

By law, UConn, CSU, and regional community technical colleges must waive tuition in undergraduate and graduate programs for qualified, active Connecticut National Guard members; to qualify for a tuition waiver, the member must be (1) certified by the adjutant general, or his designee, to be in good standing and (2) enrolled in or accepted for admission to a degree-granting program ([CGS §§ 10a-77\(d\)](#), [-99\(d\)](#), and [-105\(e\)](#)).

State law allows UConn, CSU, and the regional community-technical colleges to recover federal educational payments under the 2008 Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Act for veterans who apply and receive these benefits. For such veterans, the schools waive only the tuition amount above that for which the federal funds pay ([PA 09-159](#))

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, the federal Post-9/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education and housing to individuals (1) with at least 90 days of combined service on or after September 11, 2001 or (2) discharged with a service-connected disability

after 30 days. Either way, these people must have received an honorable discharge to be eligible. More information on the Post 9/11 Veterans Education Assistance act is available here:

http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/post_911_gibill/index.html

Employment

Municipal employers must reinstate an employee who left service of a political subdivision to enter the armed forces to his or her former position if he or she applies within 90 days after receiving a certificate confirming satisfactory military service. "Political subdivision" is defined as any town, city, borough, district, school board, board of education, public social service or welfare agency, public corporation, housing authority, redevelopment or urban renewal board or commission, or other public authority or agency established by law ([CGS § 7-462](#)).

Motor Vehicle

A veteran who applies within two years of receiving an honorable discharge is exempt from paying motor vehicle operator's license and examination fees for one licensing period ([CGS § 14-50\(c\)](#)).

A veteran may request waiver of the motor vehicle license examination if he or she (1) applies within two years of separation from service and (2) previously held a military operator's license ([CGS § 14-36\(e\)](#)).

State law allows any type of motor vehicle owned or leased by a veteran or his or her surviving spouse for one year or longer to qualify for special veterans' license plates ([CGS § 14-20b](#)).

Occupational Licenses

A veteran whose hairdressing or cosmetology license expired while he was in the armed services may have it reinstated without paying the required fees ([CGS § 20-256](#)).

The Department of Public Health (DPH) may suspend any provision of law governing qualifications for opticians with respect to World War II and Korean War veterans if the department deems the provision unjust and the suspension does not jeopardize public health and safety ([CGS § 20-147](#)).

When a veteran's embalmer and funeral director's license expires while he or she is in the service, DPH may waive the examination required for reinstatement, provided the department approves the veteran's professional qualifications. The veteran must apply within a year of separation from service ([CGS § 20-228](#)).

Housing

The entity operating any Department of Economic Development-funded low- or moderate-income rental housing project must give preference to veterans competing with other applicants when housing needs are substantially equal ([CGS § 8-75](#)).

National Guard Retirement

All Connecticut National Guard members who retire from active service honorably after at least 10 years can be placed on the National Guard's list of retirees ("retired list"). Members on the retired list may be voluntarily recalled to active duty by the governor and, when performing such duty, receive the same pay and allowances as members of a similar grade on the active list.

Specifically, the law allows (1) all members who serve honorably for 10 years to apply to be placed on the list in the highest grade in which they served and (2) all members who honorably serve 20 or more years to apply to be placed on the list at one grade above the highest grade they ever held, but not above brigadier general or sergeant major.

Each member is allowed only one retirement promotion, and the law generally requires that applications be timely and submitted to the adjutant general through the chain of command before the member retires. However, honorably discharged retired members of the Connecticut National Guard or the governor's military staff with 30 or more years of service may apply to the adjutant general for "retirement promotion" if they did not apply before retiring.

By law, people on the retired list must be withdrawn from command and line of promotion. They must be removed from unit rosters as well. Also, by law, they (1) must be kept on the state armed forces register; (2) are subject to the National Guard's rules and regulations; (3) may wear, within the limitations of law and regulations, the uniform of the rank at which they retired; (4) may, if they consent, be detailed from the retired

list and placed on active duty at the governor's order; and (5) serve without pay, except when on such duty, in which case, they are entitled to the same pay and allowances as officers of a similar grade on the active list ([CGS § 27-53](#); [PA 10-15](#)).

Veterans' Registry

The law requires the Veterans' Affairs Department to develop and maintain a contact list of armed forces members, including guard members, and honorably discharged veterans living in Connecticut, to facilitate informing listed persons about benefits and services available to, and legislation affecting, them ([CGS § 27-100c](#)).

Probate Records

When the VA needs a probate record to determine a veteran's eligibility for benefits, the official with custody of the record must provide a certified copy for free ([CGS § 45a-12](#)).

JH: ek