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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **sHB 5299**

#### ***AN ACT ESTABLISHING A COMMENDATION MEDAL, AN ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL AND THE ORDER OF PRECEDENCE FOR STATE MILITARY DECORATIONS AND AWARDS.***

#### **SUMMARY:**

This bill establishes eligibility criteria and the process for awarding two new state medals—a commendation and an achievement medal—to any member of the state armed forces and places the medals within a new, statutorily established order of precedence for all state military decorations and awards. (The bill does not specify the form of either medal, except for subsequently awarded medals.)

By law, the state’s armed forces are the (1) National Guard; (2) organized militia (i.e., the governor’s guards, the State Guard, and other military forces the governor may designate as commander-in-chief); and (3) naval militia and marine corps branch of the naval militia, whenever organized (CGS § 27-2).

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

#### **NEW STATE MEDALS**

##### ***Commendation Medal***

Under the bill, a board of officers may award a commendation medal to any member of the state armed forces who distinguished him- or herself by an act of heroism, extraordinary achievement, or meritorious service. The commendation medal under the bill may be awarded with a “V” for valor (see below) even if it is an act of valor of a lesser degree than those that make one eligible for the medal of valor. By law, a member of the state armed forces is eligible for the medal of valor by reason of conspicuous gallantry, risking his or her life, and acting above and beyond the call of duty while on military service (CGS § 27-72). It is unclear what would differentiate a valorous act

that earns a “V” under the bill’s commendation medal and existing law’s valor medal except when the individual’s valorous actions are of a “lesser degree.”

The bill specifies that valorous acts that qualify a person for the commendation medal may involve aerial flight.

**Board of Officers.** Under the bill, the Adjutant General and two officers of field grade (i.e., the rank of Major in the Army, Air Force, and Marines) or above, appointed by the Adjutant General, constitute a board of officers to receive recommendations, through military channels, to award a commendation medal to any member of the state armed forces who has distinguished him- or herself as described above.

**“V” for Valor.** The bill specifies that a bronze “V” device must be displayed on the suspension and service ribbons of commendation medals awarded for valor.

**Subsequent Awards.** A bronze oak leaf cluster is issued in lieu of succeeding awards and a silver oak leaf cluster may be worn in lieu once three bronze oak leaf clusters have been awarded. Except for acts of valor, the commendation medal cannot be awarded to general officers (i.e., the rank of Brigadier General or higher).

### ***Achievement Medal***

Under the bill, an achievement medal may be awarded to any member of the state armed forces who has distinguished him- or herself by meritorious service or achievement of a lesser degree than required for award of the bill’s commendation medal. The achievement medal cannot be awarded to general officers.

The process for (1) receiving the award recommendations, (2) awarding the medal, and (3) the medal’s form in subsequent awards is the same as it is for the commendation medal.

### **ORDER OF PRECEDENCE**

The bill sets an order of precedence for state military decorations

and awards as follows:

1. medal of valor,
2. medal of merit,
3. commendation medal,
4. achievement medal,
5. emergency service ribbon,
6. selected reserve force ribbon,
7. wartime service medal,
8. military operations service ribbon,
9. long service medal,
10. achievement ribbon and
11. outstanding unit ribbon.

This order places certain ribbon-only awards above some medals, which does not synchronize with the federal order of precedence. Federal awards that come with both medals and ribbons are placed above awards that are just ribbons.

Additionally, under the bill's precedence order, the medal of merit is just below the medal of valor and above the commendation medal; by law, a person is eligible for the merit medal when distinguishing him- or herself by exceptionally meritorious conduct in performing outstanding service while a member of the state armed forces (CGS § 27-73). But the commendation medal's criteria under the bill, for example referring to heroic acts, is such that it appears to belong directly below the medal of valor (despite that under the federal order of precedence, a commendation medal would be below a merit medal).

#### **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Joint Favorable Change of Reference

Yea 9 Nay 0 (03/08/2012)

Public Safety and Security Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 23 Nay 0 (03/15/2012)