National Guard Association of Connecticut
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February 25, 2014

Testimony in Favor of SB 210, 212, 213,216 and 217 and HB 5297 and 5299

Good Afternoon Sen. Leone, Representative Hennessy and members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs. I am Debbi Newton, Legislative Chair of the National Guard Association of Connecticut (NGACT). I have served in that position for 11 years and have been a member of the Connecticut National Guard for 34 years.

I am here today to speak in favor of several bills currently before you.

SB 210, ACC Veterans Who Served in the National Guard, SB 216, ACC Veterans and SB 213, ACC The Veterans' Opportunities Pilot Program are all bills that seek to assist Veterans either by determining which benefits Connecticut National Guard Veterans do not receive in Connecticut and how that may be rectified, provide for a study to determine what hardships Connecticut's Veterans do face and assist our most vulnerable Veterans with finding jobs. Anything that can be done to alleviate issues that make our Veterans vulnerable and that will empower them to become whole again is something NGACT stands behind and fully supports. Homelessness and joblessness are two hardships that must, and can, be eliminated and their elimination will assist our Veterans in continuing to do what they have already proven they can do…give back to their communities, state and nation.

SB 212, ACC Implementation of the Recommendations of the Military Occupational Specialty Task Force and HB 5299, ACC the Findings of the Military Occupational Specialty Task Force are both bills NGACT is very happy to support. As you know, NGACT originally brought this concept to the Veterans' Affairs Committee and the bill authorizing credit for military training became reality three years ago. Last year we were happy to see the bill authorizing the Task Force pass. Now we all get to see recommendations of the Task Force acted upon. Allowing our Soldiers and Airmen to take training they have received in the military for certain occupations and transfer that training to possibly state certifications without having to put forth additional time, effort and dollars to receive the same training again. This allows our Soldiers and Airmen to enter the civilian workforce sooner and with less effort than before. We are proud to have been a part of this legislation and to see it come to such a positive place.

HB 5297, ACC A Deduction from the Income Tax for Amounts Received as Active Service Pay and HB 5298, ACC Active Service Pay for Members of the National Guard. NGACT fully supports any bill that will put a few extra dollars in our Soldiers' and Airmens' pockets, whether through payments for active service or income tax exemptions. We appreciate the acknowledgement of the committee and the Legislature

of the sacrifices made by Connecticut Guardsmen and stand ready to work with you in any way possible to make these initiatives reality.

Finally, **SB 217, ACC Excused Absences from School for Children of Service Members** is an idea we brought to you last year after learning the Texas Legislature was considering the same concept. Unfortunately, I do not know if it was passed in Texas or not. As we all know, having a parent deploy is very stressful for a child. Allowing them to spend some uninterrupted time with that parent before and/or after a deployment can help ease some of that stress which the children take into the classroom with them. We are not asking for a "get out of school free" card here, parents and students would be responsible for getting the assignments they would miss in advance, completing them while on the excused absence and turning them in upon their return to school in order to receive the excused absence. Providing a maximum of 10 days excused absence allows for children whose parents deploy for six months the ability to spend 5 days with them prior to the deployment and five days with them upon their return home. For children whose parents deploy for a full year, the 10 days per school year could be used at the beginning in one year and the end of the deployment during the next school year. Many parents pull their children out of school for mini vacations or reunions upon their return or prior to the deployment already, which hurts the students' attendance records, potentially holding them back a year, and could also hurt the school's standing if it is in a high military populated area. Parents would have to request the excused absence in advance and have it approved by the school. NGACT urges passage of this initiative and looks forward to working with the Committee and the Education Community to make it happen. We would be very happy to work with the State Board of Education on this as well.

NGACT fully understands the fiscal realities we all face, but we ask you to remember when casting your votes on these bills, that they directly affect only 1% of our population…those who chose to serve their Country and, in some cases their State, but will also have an indirect affect on their families. Some of these proposals do carry price tags, but have the potential to pay off in the long run. These bills are all effective ways of saying thank you to these men and women, helping them transition into civilian life as productive citizens and relieving some of the stresses they may face.

I thank you for your time and for what you do for the National Guardsmen, Veterans, other Military Members and Retirees of Connecticut and their families. This concludes my testimony and I am available for any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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