

Testimony in Support of Preserving the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund for Future Generations of Connecticut Veterans

Good afternoon Senator Leone, Representative Hennessy and members of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I am Dan Thurston, Chairman of the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition (CVMC).

I am here today to speak in favor of proposals to insure that The Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund continues to provide veterans and their families with temporary assistance in times of financial hardship.

In 1919 the State of Connecticut established The Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund (SSMF) and place the fiduciary responsibilities with the State Treasurer. In December 1919 The American Legion accepted the responsibility for the administration of the fund and has executed that sacred responsibility for more than 94 years.

In January 2006 the legislature did a comprehensive Legislative Program Review and Investigation of the SSMF and its operation. The legislative review committee, in its report, recommended that Part II of Chapter 506 of the Connecticut General Statutes be amended to transfer the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund's trust fund from the fiduciary control of the treasurer of the State of Connecticut to the American Legion (Department of Connecticut). Governor Malloy in his FY14-15 Budget reaffirmed this recommendation of the legislative review committee.

The 2013 Connecticut General Assembly enacted legislation that took into account some of the recommendations of the Governor's Budget Proposal but did not transfer fiduciary control to the American Legion or adequately address the financial requirements needed to meet the operating expenses of the fund administration.

There are several bills that have been raised in this session that address the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund. Each of the proposed bills, although different in their approach, seeks to resolve the issues that were not addressed in the 2013 legislation and ensure that the needs of veterans and their families are met.

Governor Malloy, in his Midterm Budget Recommendations (SB-21), modified his FY14-15 Budget recommendation by leaving the fiduciary responsibility with the State Treasurer and providing a \$635,000 appropriation in FY-15 under the Department of Veterans' Affairs for the administration of the SSMF. The CVMC representatives have expressed concerns based on their preliminary review of the Governor's proposal and recommend that the legislation enacted address the following points:

- a) That the corpus and the interest generated be restricted to the sole use of providing financial assistance to veterans and their families, and
- b) The legislation insure that the funding for the administration be appropriated annually.

Diligent deliberation and consideration of the various proposals that have been submitted and the implementation of legislation that will allow the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund to achieve the ultimate goal of insuring that

The fiduciary responsibilities include that the corpus of the fund and the earnings be protected from uses other than its intended purpose, and

Provide for the growth of the fund to adequately insure that it meets the needs of future generations of veterans and their families, and

That there is reliable funding appropriated annually to cover the administrative cost.

In summary, the need for assistance by the estimated 3-6 thousand military personal returning to Connecticut in the next few years will place a significant demand on all services provided by the State and Veterans Service Organizations and we need to prepare to meet those needs.

The veterans of Connecticut and their families have sacrificed in service to their Nation and we must maintain our commitment to assist in overcoming financial hardship and help them to transition back to their communities.

On behalf of the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition member organizations, I thank you for your time to allow us to express our support of the Soldiers, Sailors, and Marines Fund and for your commitment to the Veterans and Citizens of Connecticut. This concludes my testimony and I am available for any questions you may have.

Respectful Submitted,



Daniel C. Thurston
Chairman Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition
State Vice-Commander, American Veterans (AmVets), Connecticut
Vietnam Veteran, USAF
860-485-2676
Legionpost137@snet.net