

Margaret Middleton, Executive Director
Connecticut Veterans Legal Center
Testimony for Veterans Affairs Committee Hearing of 2.25.14

Co-Chairs, Vice Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

Good afternoon. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you about SB 212 and HB 5299, Acts Concerning The Findings Of The Military Occupational Specialty Task Force. My name is Margaret Middleton. I am the executive director of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center. CVLC's mission is to help veterans recovering from homelessness and serious mental illness overcome legal barriers to housing, healthcare and income.

For many veterans, the very first barrier to these goals is having a smooth transition from military to civilian life. Almost a quarter of a million veterans call Connecticut home. 8,000 more will return home to the state soon. Many of them come home with new skills acquired during their time in the military, skills that would be of great value in the Connecticut labor market. Veterans are emergency medical technicians (EMTs), police officers, commercial drivers and electricians, among other important jobs. But existing licensing and educational credit rules stand in the way of work-ready veterans as they transition back to civilian life. These highly-trained veterans are forced to delay their return to civilian work, to pay for costly and unnecessary trainings, and to choose jobs that do not use the full range of their skills.

These bills address these problems in several ways:

- First, for many types of licenses, the bill will require state agencies to give veterans credit for equivalent military training and experience.
 - Second, the bill guarantees that all veterans will receive appropriate educational credit for their military training at Connecticut's public colleges and universities.

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Licensing requirements are also a barrier to employment to military families who are stationed in our state. Military spouses — many of whom are teachers, nurses and child-care workers — are also kept out of the job market because of Connecticut's licensing rules. In fact, studies show that 90 percent of military spouses are underemployed.

Other states are far ahead of Connecticut in addressing these challenges. The White House has recognized Maryland as the national leader on military credentialing. In our neighbor state, New York, Governor Cuomo has already initiated reforms to the state's occupational licensing processes. And Illinois supports military families by offering temporary licenses to qualified military spouses who move to the state. . These bills would be a big step forward in bringing Connecticut up to par with other states that have taken steps to support veterans, and make Connecticut's economy more competitive nationally.

In conclusion, on behalf of the veterans we are proud to serve, I'm grateful to the Committee for proposing SB 212 and HB 5299 and raising awareness of the particular barriers to employment facing our returning servicemen and –women.

I would defer any questions you have to my colleagues.