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*Veterans' Affairs Committee*  
*Connecticut General Assembly*

**Testimony in Support of Proposed House Bill 6713, An Act Increasing the Retirement Age for the Horse Guard Commandants.**

Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, Senator Martin, Representative Yaccarino and members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, my name is Michael Downes and I am submitting this written testimony in support of Proposed House Bill 6713, An Act Increasing the Retirement Age for the Horse Guard Commandants.

It was my honor to serve the state of Connecticut under three governors as a member of the First Company Governor's Horse Guards, an organized militia unit under the Connecticut National Guard, headquartered in Avon, CT. I served for ten years - four enlisted and six as an officer. I served my final four years as the Major Commandant in command of the company from 2008-2012.

The duties of the state's four militia units are voluntary and primarily ceremonial in nature. Militia members do not go through basic training. Members of the two horse guard companies go through a recruitment period where they are instructed in drill and ceremony, and military horsemanship. Militia members do receive some emergency preparedness training incidental to individual commands, but are generally not called upon in times of civil distress, and certainly never called upon to serve in armed conflict as Army and Air National Guardsmen would be.

Officers of the four organized state militia units are not promoted the same way officers in the National Guard are. Officers are elected from among the enlisted personnel of each company in the old militia tradition. The names of these officers-elect are submitted by the company civil secretary to the Adjutant General for consideration. Commissions are then issued to the officers by the authority of the governor through the Adjutant General. These officers' commissions are strictly state commissions, not federal ones.

Despite the significant differences in the duties and manner of promotion between members of the organized militia and the National Guard, militia officers are all required to retire at the age of 64, just as officers in the National Guard are.

I believe that in consideration of these significant differences an increase of the retirement age for Majors Commandant of the horse guard units is entirely appropriate.

It should be noted that all members of these militia units are unpaid volunteers who have dedicated themselves to upholding the important militia traditions and history of Connecticut. The First Company Governor's Horse Guard has had an unbroken line of service since its founding in 1788, and the Second Company has served since 1808. I can tell you first-hand that commanding one of these units is challenging and time-consuming. When an individual of quality and merit has been installed by a vote of their peers to oversee their company it is unseemly that they should be pushed out the door by an arbitrary military retirement age that was not instituted to fit their vastly different circumstances.

This retirement age had no impact on me – I served as commandant from the age of 36 to the age 40. However, many talented leaders capable of continued dedicated service to the state have had their tenures cut short by this arbitrary retirement requirement. There is the threat that good horse guard commanders will continue to be turned out, and this is a tremendous waste of voluntary resources to the state of Connecticut.

Volunteers of the company and officers senior to the commandant are the best judges to the fitness of a good commandant. If a good commandant wishes to continue serving and the company re-elects them at the age of 64, it makes sense that they should be allowed to continue serving.

There are numerous exceptions to military regulations and law concerning the state militia units. I believe this proposed change is one that will have a positive impact on the volunteer service rendered to the state by its horse guard companies. It will help preserve the institutional knowledge and capacity of these companies, and will ultimately improve morale and volunteer retention, which are essential to the success of these militias.

I thank you for taking the time to read my testimony. I am available at the convenience of any of the Committee members should you wish to contact me concerning this legislation.