



National Guard Association of Connecticut
360 Broad Street, Hartford, CT 06105-3795
www.ngact.org

February 17, 2015

Testimony in Favor of Senate Bills 520, 524, 526, 529, 531, 532 and House Bills 6385 and 6779

Good Afternoon Sen. Flexer, 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 12 years and have been a member of the Connecticut National Guard for 35 years.

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

Senate Bill 520 and House Bill 6779 both propose increasing from 50% to 100% the state income tax deduction for military retired pay. NGACT supports this increase. We have offered testimony every year for the past 12 years in support of the 100% exemption and were very pleased when the 50% exemption passed in 2005, taking effect a few years later. Our military retirees deserve to have that exemption increased. When I testified on this in 2005, 16 states offered 100% exemption, that number is now 18 to include Massachusetts, Florida, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Missouri will be phasing it in to 100% between now and 2020. In 2005 seven states had no state income tax, that number is now eight. And 20 states offered at least a partial exemption – which number is now 19 as Missouri is phasing in the 100%. Many retirees have, or are, moving to states that either have no state income tax, or that exempt military retired pay from the tax. As a retiree, every penny counts. I am getting close to retirement myself, and am looking at states that do not tax military retired pay for my future home. NGACT thanks you for once again bringing this proposal to public hearing and urges your support in getting it passed this year.

Senate Bill 524 – An Act Exempting State Active Duty Pay from the Income Tax and Senate Bill 529, An Act Increasing State Active Duty Pay are both proposals NGACT has offered testimony on before and fully support. Imagine, if you will, you are a young Soldier or Airmen who has chosen to serve in the National Guard because not only can you serve your country, but you can also serve your state in times of emergency. You are a sergeant who has been in the Guard for five years and you make \$86.02 per day when on duty. As a civilian, you have worked hard and gone to trade school or college and have a great civilian job making \$30 an hour at eight hours a day - that is \$240 a day. You get called up by your unit to come in and assist in a state emergency. You drop everything to do what you volunteered to do, perhaps leaving your family for and then the state takes income taxes out of that smaller check. Raising the state active duty minimum pay would certainly help those junior Soldiers and Airmen and exempting the state active duty pay would be a very small way to say thank you to the Guardsmen the state calls out when our citizens need them. I am on the higher end of the

pay scale, and the last time I got called out on state active duty, for about a week, less than \$5.00 came out of my pay for state income taxes. It may not seem like a large amount, but to those young Soldiers and Airmen with families, every dollar counts, especially when they leave their higher paying civilian jobs to answer their state's call.

Senate Bill 526, An Act Providing an Income Tax Exemption to Members of the Armed Forces and Veterans. NGACTION has suggested this for a number of years and is glad to see it on the agenda today. We are not asking for an exemption of full pay; that would be fiscally irresponsible. We are asking that the state recognize military service by offering an exemption on state income taxes for those currently serving and for veterans that have served. Illinois and Michigan offer full exemptions. Montana exempts all Title 10 pay and Pennsylvania, Ohio and Minnesota exempt all active duty military pay earned outside their states. Arkansas exempts the first \$6,000, North Dakota offers a partial exemption for National Guard and Reserve pay, Oklahoma and Vermont offer an exemption for the first \$1,500 and Virginia offers an exemption for the first \$15,000 phased out at \$30,000.

Senate Bill 531, An Act Concerning Tuition Fee Waivers for Members of the Connecticut National Guard and **Senate Bill 532, An Act Concerning Tuition Waivers for Charter Oak State College** have been before you many times. In the 1980s, legislation was passed that granted tuition waivers to state colleges and Universities to members in good standing of the Connecticut National Guard. That tuition waiver was expanded a few years ago to include advanced degrees. Somehow, Charter Oak State College was never included in the tuition waiver program, and to my knowledge, is the only state school that does not participate. They do, however, offer CLEP testing for free to members of the National Guard. Summer, Winter and Extension Courses have also not been included in the tuition waivers because they do not charge a tuition, but rather are fee-based courses. Many of our Guardsmen take these shorter term courses in order to finish their degrees sooner or to fit the courses in between deployment cycles and military training obligations. In some cases, these shorter sessions are the only time that a course they need for their degree is offered. Student fees have dramatically increased over the years, equaling and in some cases, surpassing, tuition rates, effectively making it very difficult for some students to become full-time and having to stretch their educations over many years. Finishing their degrees make these servicemen and women much more valuable members of their communities and assist them in finding rewarding careers that help them support their families. Many Guardsmen have deployed and are eligible for the Post 9/11 GI Bill, but there are still some gaps for them in education benefits. For those that have not deployed or served on active duty long enough to receive the Post 9/11 GI Bill Benefits, waiving the tuition at Charter Oak and fees for the other courses may be the difference in them completing their degree or not. With unemployment among our Veterans so high, it seems to me that this is a great way to reach out to our Veterans, less than 1% of the population by the way, and give them the means to earn their degree, thereby having the ability to earn a living and give back to their state and communities.

Finally, **House Bill 6385, An Act Providing Free Admission to and Parking at State Parks for Connecticut Veterans** is also an idea that has been before you in varying forms for many years. In fact, I have heard some of you say you thought this act had, in fact, already been passed. It has not. Cost of entrance to the State Parks and Forests is minimal. Parking fees range from \$6 on weekdays to \$13 on weekends or holidays. Many parks do charge a fee at all during the week, and many only charge a fee from May

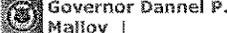
through October. We understand that the financial situation in the state is not the best it has been, so let's look at it from the dollars and cents side of things. The average weekend cost of admission is \$9.00 per carload (or family). Let's say 200 Veteran families take advantage of the free admission per month. That is \$1,800 a month. Over the six month period that most parks charge a fee, the total cost would be \$10,800. But let us also remember that many of these parks have food for sale or souvenir shops which families would use... families that might not otherwise even go to these parks. In fact, I see this having a positive effect on potential revenue. If you go to a movie or restaurant and enjoy it, you tend to tell other people who then go based on what you've told them. The same would hold true with the parks and forests. If I go to a park I have not been to before because I can get in free and I tell my three brothers and they take their families someplace they might not have before, there are now three families paying admission. The National Park Service also offers a free annual pass to all National Parks to members of the US Military and their dependents. I have attached the State Park Fee Schedule as well as the National Parks and Federal Lands Pass Series information. Allowing Service Members and their families the ability to enjoy our state parks and forests without charging them is a very nice way of saying thank you for their service and of exposing people to our wonderful resources.

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,

Debbi Newton
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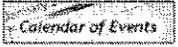
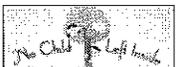
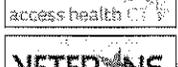
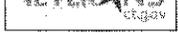


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State Park Fees	
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I - P	Q - Z
State Forest Fees	

State Parks and Forests Fees

Some facilities do not charge a parking fee and others charge only for weekends and holidays. **Facilities not listed here do not charge for parking or camping.**

Dinosaur, Fort Trumbull and Gillette Castle State Parks offer free parking. There is a per person admission fee to visit the Dinosaur Exhibit Center, the Fort Trumbull Visitor Center or for touring the Castle.

Special Passes	
The Charter Oak Pass provides access to the State Parks and Forests and is available free to Connecticut residents, 65 years of age or older.	
The Heritage Passport provides convenient access to three unique parks: Dinosaur, Fort Trumbull and Gillette Castle.	
The Veterans Pass provides access to the State Parks and Forests and is available free to Connecticut residents with a service connected disability.	
Season passes allow unlimited vehicle access to any state park or recreation area that has a parking fee.	

KEY:	R = CT Registered Vehicle Fee	NC = No Charge
	NR = Out-of-State Registered Vehicle Fee	n/a = Not Applicable

State Park Fees			
A - D			
Park Name	Weekends/ Holidays	Weekdays	Camping
Bigelow Hollow State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$5 R after 4 pm \$6 NR after 4 pm	NC	n/a
Black Rock State Park and Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	\$ 6.00 R \$ 10.00 NR	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents \$50/night rustic cabins for residents \$60/night rustic cabins for non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Burr Pond State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	\$ 6.00 R \$ 10.00 NR	n/a
Chatfield Hollow State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	\$ 6.00 R \$ 10.00 NR	n/a
Devil's Hopyard State Park and Campground	NC	NC	\$14/night CT residents \$24/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Dinosaur State Park	Age 13 and Over: \$6 Ages 6-12: \$2 Ages 5 and under: Free Heritage Passport Information		n/a

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E - H			
Park Name	Weekends/ Holidays	Weekdays	Camping
Fort Trumbull State Park	Visitor Center and Fort Tours Only: Age 13 and Over: \$6 Ages 6-12: \$2 Ages 5 and under: Free Heritage Passport Information		n/a
Gay City State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	n/a



	Age 13 and Over: \$6 Ages 6-12: \$2 Ages 5 and under: Free Heritage Passport Information		
Gillette Castle State Park			n/a
Hammonasset State Park and Campground	\$ 13.00 R \$ 22.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm.	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	\$35/night CT residents \$45/night non-CT residents \$70/night rustic cabin \$85/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Harkness Memorial State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	\$ 6.00 R \$ 10.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	n/a
Hopeville Pond State Park and Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night for non-CT residents \$50/night rustic cabins for residents \$60/night rustic cabins for non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Housatonic Meadows State Park and Campground	NC	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents \$50/night rustic cabins for residents \$60/night rustic cabins for non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee

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J - P			
Park Name	Weekends/ Holidays	Weekdays	Camping
Indian Well State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$5 R after 4 pm \$6 NR after 4 pm	\$ 6.00 R \$ 10.00 NR \$5 R after 4 pm \$6 NR after 4 pm	n/a
Kent Falls State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR Fees in effect until 7PM	NC	n/a
Kettletown State Park and Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents \$50/night rustic cabins for residents \$60/night rustic cabins for non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Lake Waramaug State Park and Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents \$50/night rustic cabins for residents \$60/night rustic cabins for non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Macedonia Brook State Park and Campground	NC	NC	\$14/night CT residents \$24/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Mashamoquet Brook State Park and Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	\$14/night CT residents \$24/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Mount Tom State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	\$ 6.00 R \$ 10.00 NR	n/a

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Q - Z			
Park Name	Weekends/ Holidays	Weekdays	Camping
Quaddick State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	n/a
Rocky Neck State Park and Campground	\$ 13.00 R \$ 22.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	\$20/night CT residents \$30/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
			\$33/\$37/\$40/night CT residents

Salt Rock State Park Campground	NC	NC	\$45/\$48/\$52/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Selden Neck State Park	NC	NC	\$5 per person per night (Primitive riverside camping)
Sherwood Island State Park	\$ 13.00 R \$ 22.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	n/a
Sleeping Giant State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$5 R after 4 pm \$6 NR after 4 pm	NC	n/a
Squantz Pond State Park	\$ 13.00 R \$ 22.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$6 R after 4 pm \$7 NR after 4 pm	n/a
Stratton Brook State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	n/a
Wadsworth Falls State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	n/a
Wharton Brook State Park	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR \$5 R after 4 pm \$6 NR after 4 pm	NC	n/a

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State Forest Fees			
Park Name	Weekends/ Holidays	Weekdays	Camping
American Legion State Forest and Campground	NC	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee
Cockaponset State Forest-Pattaconk Recreation Area	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	n/a
Pachaug State Forest - Mt. Misery Campground	NC	NC	\$14/night CT residents \$24/night non-CT residents
Pachaug State Forest - Green Falls Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents
People's State Forest and Campground	\$ 9.00 R \$ 15.00 NR	NC	\$17/night CT residents \$27/night non-CT residents Plus Reservation Processing Fee

If you have questions or need additional information on Connecticut State Parks and Forests, please contact the State Parks Division by e-mail at deep.stateparks@ct.gov or by phone at 860-424-3200.

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America the Beautiful

The National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass Series

A pass is your ticket to more than 2,000 federal recreation sites. Each pass covers entrance fees at national parks and national wildlife refuges as well as standard amenity fees at national forests and grasslands, and at lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation. A pass covers entrance and standard amenity fees for a driver and all passengers in a personal vehicle at per vehicle fee areas (or up to four adults at sites that charge per person). Children age 15 or under are admitted free.

The following passes make up the series:

Annual Pass

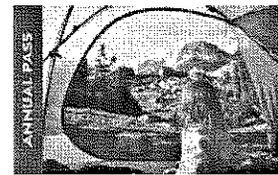
\$80 annual pass

Available to everyone.

Can be obtained in person at a federal recreation site, or by calling 1-888-ASK USGS (1-888-275-8747), Ext. 3 (Hours of operation are: 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Mountain time), or online. [Buy Now](#)

Non-transferable.

[Frequently Asked Questions about the Interagency Annual Pass](#)



Free Annual Pass for U.S. Military

Available to U.S. military members and dependents in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard and also, Reserve and National Guard members.

Must be obtained in person at a Federal recreation site by showing a Common Access Card (CAC) or Military ID (Form 1173).

[Frequently Asked Questions about the Annual Pass for U.S. Military](#)



Senior Pass

\$10 Lifetime pass

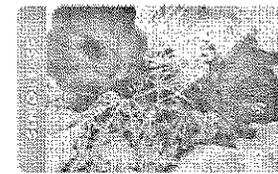
For U.S. citizens or permanent residents age 62 or over.

May be obtained in person at a federal recreation site or through the mail using this application form. The cost of obtaining a Senior Pass through the mail is twenty dollars (\$20). Ten (\$10) for the Senior Pass and ten (\$10) for processing the application. Applicants must provide documentation of age and residency or citizenship.

May provide a 50 percent discount on some amenity fees charged for facilities and services such as camping, swimming, boat launch, and specialized interpretive services.

Generally does NOT cover or reduce special recreation permit fees or fees charged by concessioners.

[Frequently Asked Questions about the Interagency Senior Pass](#)



Access Pass

Free

For U.S. citizens or permanent residents with permanent disabilities.

May be obtained in person at a federal recreation site or through the mail using this application form. The cost of obtaining an Access Pass through the mail is ten dollars (\$10) for processing the application (the Pass is free). Applicants must provide documentation of permanent disability and residency or citizenship.



May provide a 50 percent discount on some amenity fees charged for facilities and services such as camping, swimming, boat launching, and specialized interpretive services.

Generally does NOT cover or reduce special recreation permit fees or fees charged by concessioners.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Interagency Access Pass

Volunteer Pass

Free

For volunteers with 250 service hours with federal agencies that participate in the Interagency Pass Program.

Contact your local federal recreation site for more information about volunteer opportunities or visit Volunteer.gov.



NOTE: Golden Access and Golden Age Passports are no longer sold. However, these passes will continue to be honored according to the provisions of the pass.

The five agencies that participate in the Interagency Pass Program are:

- National Park Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation

See the site locations that issue these passes.

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