



**Testimony of Kendall F. Wiggin
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Connecticut State Library
Concerning Senate Bill 1016
“An Act Concerning the Digitization of Military Records”
Veterans' Affairs Committee
March 3, 2015**

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy and distinguished members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee.

My name is Kendall Wiggin and I am the State Librarian. The State Library is committed to making information found in government records as accessible as possible to the citizens of Connecticut. The core of our mission is "to provide high quality ... information services to state government and the citizens of Connecticut" and "to work cooperatively with related agencies and constituent organizations in providing those services" in an effort "to preserve and make accessible the records of Connecticut's history and heritage." My office is concerned that SB 1016, if enacted, will cause confusion among veterans and researchers who will have to search in two different locations to find desired military records, some of which could be available in one, but not the other location. Passage of this bill could lead to duplicative systems at a cost to taxpayers at the same time when the State Library is being asked to make reductions in staffing, services and expenditures.

Proposed bill SB 1016

Although the bill proposes to make military records publically accessible on the State Library's website, I believe there is a misunderstanding of the organization of military records held by the Library. The bill defines "military records" as individual service records, including, but not limited to, dates of service, unit assignments and awards, as well as records relating to the unit in which such individual served, including, but not limited to, after action reports and written narratives. We believe that this bill was drafted under the misconception of what constitutes an individual service record. There is no one complete personnel file for each Connecticut veteran. Military service records are found in many different record groups in the State Archives as

well as other parts of the State Library collection. There are approximately 25 different record groups in the State Archives in addition to the Military Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs including the General Assembly, the State Comptroller, Department of Labor, Town and Borough Governments and a variety of veterans' organizations which contain military and service records. The State Library also has a number of compiled resources containing information about those who served which may need to be reviewed for inclusion in the database per the bill's proposed requirements.

The bill proposes the creation of two separate but parallel databases: one maintained by the State Library and one maintained by the Military Department. The records to be included would cover the time periods up to World War II for the Military Department and to the present for the State Library. This would result in veterans and other researchers having to search two different locations to find the desired records, some of which could be available in one but not the other location.

The State Library is already working to provide more digital content and searchable databases on its website. We have undertaken our "Remembering World War One" project which includes capturing digital images of veterans records and makes them available for public discovery and research. We currently have three veterans databases available: Fitches Home for Soldiers, 1883-1940; Military Service Questionnaires, 1919-1920 and the Noble Pension Database which contains records of Civil War and Spanish American War veterans.

In addition, to the inconvenience for veterans and researchers, these duplicative systems would incur double the cost to taxpayers for development, installation and maintenance. Given that the bill provides no additional funding to either agency at a time when both are being asked to make reductions in services and expenses, would, if enacted, be a burden on existing agency resources.

Section 2 of the proposed bill would require the Military Department to redact "from such records (A) Social Security numbers; (B) date of birth; (C) home address; and (D) any personally identifiable information if such disclosure would constitute a violation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, as amended from time to time." However, the bill does not require the State Library to

redact any information. This would confuse the public into thinking that information may be available from the Library but not the Military Department.

The bill ignores the fact that Connecticut General Statutes §1-219 restricts veterans' military records including, but not limited, to a DD 214 form for 75 years. The current statute permits the disclosure of veterans' addresses to those providing or seeking to provide a veteran with a benefit whereas the proposed act under section 2 redacts this information. If the proposed bill passes, this provision would conflict with the existing statutes causing confusion on whether veterans' addresses are releasable.

The State Library is already the repository for the state's historical military service records. State Archives staff has worked on multiple occasions with the Military Department in the past including the transfer of 550 cubic feet of records, dating from 1776 to 1986, in 1988 when the State Armory was preparing for a major renovation. State Library staff is in discussions with Military Department personnel to scan World War One era records that remain in its custody as part of our centennial recognition project. We hope that at the conclusion of the project, the original records would be transferred to the State Archives.

My office is very willing to work with the Veterans' Affairs Committee to rework the bill to better meet the objectives of the Committee.