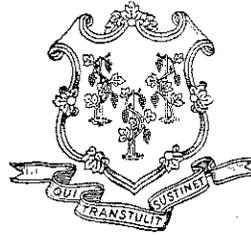


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February 17, 2015

**Testimony to the Joint Committee on Veterans' Affairs
SB 694 An Act Concerning Services Available To Veterans On State
College And University Campuses**

Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, Senator Leone, Representative Nicasastro, Senator Martin, and Representative Yaccarino:

My name is Beth Bye, State Senator representing the 5th District Towns of West Hartford, Farmington, Burlington, and Bloomfield.

I am testifying today in support of SB 694, and I thank you for hearing this bill before you today.

The Veterans Oasis is just that- an oasis for veterans at our two and four year colleges in Connecticut.

I became acutely aware of how important these centers are last fall at a veteran event at Tunxis Community College. Senators Murphy and Blumenthal were there, along with Congresswoman Esty. We heard directly from veterans and parents of veterans about how critical it is for veterans to have other veterans in their lives. They explained that the Oasis was just that – a place, unlike any other – in a challenging landscape when they returned home from combat. The Oasis is a gathering place of refuge and support.

The Oasis at Tunxis is very active. It is staffed mostly by volunteers and by a coordinator who has made this work her calling, and treated these veterans like family. We heard compelling testimony from veterans about how the center helped them stay in school. Many of these individuals spoke about how it helped them survive in their lives beyond school.

We heard a heartbreaking story from a father of a veteran, whose son had committed suicide. He described how the Oasis had been such an important place for his son who had struggled since returning from combat. His family volunteers and fundraises for the Tunxis Oasis now.

As I researched the Oasis services, I realized that, while there is a designated space on each Community College and Connecticut State University campus, the paid staffing is either patchwork or non-existent, and the programming varies widely.

The Tunxis Oasis is a model program, but it relies almost solely on one woman's passion and compassion to bring veterans together and support them as needed. Dr. Cathryn L. Addy, the College President, has been a big supporter as well. This Oasis has a whatever-it-takes mentality.

I am sure that there are other examples in the system of good programming, but I believe we owe it to our veterans to assure that all campuses have the services available for them when they come home and are ready to go back to school.

I am open to any questions the members might have.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Beth Bye". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Beth Bye