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**Testimony from the Veteran's and Military Affairs Section  
of the CT Bar Association**

**SB1015  
SB1016  
HB5641  
HB5233**

**SB1015. 'An Act Expanding Programs for Veterans in the Judicial Department'**, to require a separate veterans' docket be established in each judicial district and to require the Court Support Services Division to report on participation and eligibility for certain pretrial diversion programs.

The VMAS **OPPOSES** this Bill. All citizens should be treated equally under the law -- particularly the criminal law. The rights of victims must be respected, and those rights are not respected when defendants are given special categorical rights and privileges based on their status. More importantly, we cannot have a rule of law when one segment of our society is treated more harshly or more leniently than any other. There already exists a mechanism through which a judge can take into consideration any mitigating circumstances such as (1) a defendant's affliction from PTSD or other mental or physical disability and (2) a defendant's good standing in the community as to which honorable service in the military should be credited. Additionally, the legislature recently adopted a statute allowing a judge to afford veterans a second opportunity for accelerated rehabilitation. Therefore, our criminal justice system already gives a great deal of deference to military service. However, as this bill allows for the inclusion of individuals who have received bad conduct discharges, which can only be issued through conviction at court-martial, the law gives special treatment to individuals who have already demonstrated a propensity for criminal behavior. Moreover, this bill has the potential to harm veterans, as the creation of a separate system shines a spotlight on the small minority of veterans with criminal justice matters and carries the potential to perpetuate negative stereotypes about all veterans. This is especially so where the wording of bill defines a veteran in an exceptionally negative way that is in no way representative of all veterans. The notion of a "veteran's court" suggests that veterans are broken people in need of special help. This is offensive to many veterans who deal daily with negative stereotypes about the veteran community. Finally, in light of our state's financial state, the Judicial Branch budget has no room for the creation of any such docket that can be effectively and fairly implemented.

**SB 1016 'An Act Concerning the Digitization of Military Records'**, to require the State Librarian and the Military Department to establish a searchable online database containing the military records of Connecticut veterans.

The VMAS **OPPOSES** this Bill as significant portions of individual military records are protected under the United States Privacy Act. There is no mention in this bill as to whether submission of such records will be voluntary on the part of the veteran, or whether the state will be responsible for redacting personally identifying information such as social security numbers, dates of birth, and home addresses. There is no limitation on what these records may be used for. Therefore, the bill has significant potential to endanger the privacy rights of Connecticut veterans.

**HB 5641 'An Act Waiving Firearm Training Course Requirements for Certain Veterans'**, to allow for waiver of certain gun safety courses for veterans.

The VMAS **SUPPORTS** the bill with the *caveat* that it apply only to veterans who can establish relevant firearms training within 5 years of discharge from armed services, or service in an MOS or rating which regularly required the use and proficiency in firearms. Although the military firearm training is more expansive than that required for a CT permit, safe usage and safe ownership is paramount to responsible gun ownership. A person who goes through basic weapons training during boot camp and then serves twenty years in a support role with no additional training may have skills and knowledge that has atrophied and may not be suitable for this waiver.

Therefore the VMAS would suggest the following caveats:

Veterans who either served in a rating or MOS which required qualification with and regular use of the 9mm handgun; or veterans who can provide proof of training and qualification on the 9mm handgun within five years of their discharge shall be exempt from the training requirements for obtaining a Connecticut pistol permit.

Veterans who either served in a rating or MOS which required qualification with and regular use of a rifle; or veterans who can provide proof of training and qualification on any military issued rifle within five years of their discharge shall be exempt from the training requirements for obtaining a Connecticut long gun eligibility certificate.

**HB 5233 'An Act Requiring a Study of Hardships Prevalent among Veterans'**, to study the hardships prevalent among veterans in Connecticut

The VMAS **SUPPORTS** this legislation **BUT** asks that a hardship study and employment assessments be inclusive of all ranks and experience levels, as presently the overwhelming majority of vocational and transitional training opportunities throughout the state are tailored towards individuals without existing higher education credentials or specialized skills. This is no longer representative of today's armed forces in which advanced degrees, leadership experience,

and specialized training are more prevalent. Efforts should be made to assist veterans with such qualifications transition into meaningful, non-entry level employment commensurate with their experience and educational backgrounds.