



General Assembly

February Session, 2016

***Raised Bill No. 5347***

LCO No. 1038



Referred to Committee on PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS

Introduced by:  
(PRI)

***AN ACT IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE TO VETERANS BY THE ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE UNIT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS BASED ON A PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE STUDY.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Subsections (b) and (c) of section 27-102l of the 2016  
2 supplement to the general statutes are repealed and the following is  
3 substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

4 (b) (1) The commissioner may appoint a unit head to administer a  
5 veterans' advocacy and assistance unit for the aid and benefit of  
6 veterans [,] and their spouses, [and] eligible dependents and family  
7 members. Such unit shall conduct an annual training course for any  
8 city or town employee designated a veterans' service contact person  
9 pursuant to subsection (b) of section 27-135. The unit shall have a staff  
10 of not less than eight men and women, including six service officers,  
11 and clerical personnel. The unit head and the service officers shall be  
12 veterans, as defined in section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded

13 the armed forces expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces.  
14 At least one of the service officers shall be a woman having a  
15 demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who shall be  
16 responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon the next  
17 opening of a service officer position occurring on or after July 1, 2010,  
18 at least two of the service officers shall be individuals having bilingual  
19 proficiency in English and Spanish, within existing authorized  
20 positions. Each service officer shall successfully complete a course in  
21 veterans' benefits within one year of commencement of employment  
22 and shall be assigned to one of the five congressional districts of the  
23 state.

24 (2) (A) The veterans' advocacy and assistance unit shall develop a  
25 written outreach plan identifying (i) strategies for conducting outreach  
26 to veterans and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members  
27 for purposes of providing assistance in claims for veterans' services or  
28 benefits, and (ii) to the extent possible, specific events and other  
29 opportunities to provide such assistance that are sponsored by the unit  
30 or in which the unit is participating. The unit shall update such written  
31 outreach plan as necessary to improve the efficacy of its outreach  
32 efforts.

33 (B) The unit shall develop a system through which the unit head  
34 and each service officer may electronically report information relating  
35 to outreach conducted by the unit, including, but not limited to, the  
36 number of veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family  
37 members reached and any assistance to any such individual provided  
38 at or resulting from an event or opportunity described in  
39 subparagraph (A)(ii) of this subdivision.

40 (C) The unit shall utilize the notifications received from the  
41 administrator of each health care facility in the state, pursuant to  
42 subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, to develop an annual  
43 schedule for each service officer to visit health care facilities. Any  
44 information collected as a result of such visits shall be compiled and

45 reported quarterly to the Board of Trustees for the Department of  
46 Veterans' Affairs.

47 (D) The unit shall develop an electronic tracking system in which  
48 complaints by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family  
49 members related to the quality of assistance provided by the unit are  
50 recorded and compiled. Any member of the unit recording any such  
51 complaint shall note the details of such complaint, including, but not  
52 limited to, the nature of the complaint, the date and time of its receipt,  
53 the date and time of its resolution and any relevant outcome. The unit  
54 head shall monthly review each complaint recorded in the previous  
55 month for the purpose of identifying and analyzing any recurring  
56 deficiency and improving the delivery of services provided by the unit.

57 (c) In addition to the powers and duties prescribed under section 4-  
58 8, the commissioner shall have the following powers and duties:

59 (1) To prepare studies and collect information concerning facilities  
60 and services available to members of the armed forces [ ] or veterans [  
61 their] or the spouses or eligible dependents of such members or  
62 veterans, including facilities and services for veterans who may have  
63 been exposed to a Vietnam herbicide during their periods of military  
64 service;

65 (2) To [conduct interviews in the nursing homes or hospitals  
66 throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted  
67 and ascertaining which benefits such veterans are currently receiving  
68 and are entitled to receive] require that the administrator of each  
69 health care facility, as defined in section 19a-630, in the state  
70 electronically notify the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit twice  
71 annually of (A) any new resident in such facility who is a veteran or a  
72 spouse, eligible dependent or family member of a veteran, and (B) any  
73 veterans' service or benefit such new resident receives and is entitled  
74 to receive. Each such facility, in the course of notifying said unit, shall  
75 collect and maintain any data and shall not release any individually

76 identifiable health information without the consent of the resident to  
77 whom the information pertains, in accordance with the requirements  
78 of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of  
79 1196 (P.L. 104-191) (HIPAA), as amended from time to time, or  
80 regulations adopted thereunder. As used in this subdivision, "new  
81 resident" means a resident of whom the veterans' advocacy and  
82 assistance unit has not been previously notified;

83 (3) To cooperate with service agencies and organizations  
84 throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and  
85 assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been  
86 members of the armed forces [ ] or their spouses or eligible  
87 dependents, which will indicate the availability of: (A) Educational  
88 training and retraining facilities; (B) health, medical, rehabilitation and  
89 housing services and facilities; (C) employment and reemployment  
90 services; (D) provisions of federal, state and local laws affording  
91 financial rights, privileges and benefits; and (E) other matters of  
92 similar nature;

93 (4) To assist veterans [ ] and their spouses, [and] eligible dependents  
94 and family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and  
95 establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits  
96 accruing to them under federal, state and local laws;

97 (5) To cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and  
98 private agencies securing or offering services or any benefits to  
99 veterans [ ] or their spouses or eligible dependents;

100 (6) To develop and prepare a long-range plan and mission statement  
101 for the Veterans' Home and the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit;

102 (7) To review all appeals made by veterans [ ] or their spouses, [or]  
103 eligible dependents or family members and render the final decision  
104 thereon regarding the denial of admission to any program or the  
105 refusal to render any service or benefit which is administered by the  
106 Department of Veterans' Affairs, the discharge or transfer from any

107 such program or any disciplinary action taken while participating in  
108 any such program; and

109 (8) If the Veterans' Home closes or ceases to provide housing to  
110 veterans, to provide or arrange for housing to any veteran residing at  
111 the home or the health care facility within the home on the date of such  
112 closure or on the date the Veterans' Home ceases to provide housing to  
113 veterans.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	October 1, 2016	27-1021(b) and (c)

**Statement of Purpose:**

To improve outreach efforts of the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit, increase the unit's awareness of veterans in the state's health care facilities and utilize customer feedback to address service delivery issues.

*[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]*