



General Assembly

February Session, 2016

Raised Bill No. 205

LCO No. 1493



Referred to Committee on VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Introduced by:
(VA)

AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS.

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

1 Section 1. Subsections (b) and (c) of section 27-102*l* 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2 supplement to the general statutes are repealed and the following is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, their spouses and eligible dependents and family members.
7 Such unit shall conduct an annual training course for any city or town
8 employee designated a veterans' service contact person pursuant to
9 subsection (b) of section 27-135, as amended by this act. The unit shall
10 have a staff of not less than eight men and women, including six
11 veterans' service officers, and clerical personnel. The unit head and the
12 veterans' service officers shall be veterans, as defined in section 27-103,
13 or veterans who were awarded the armed forces expeditionary medal
14 for service by the armed forces.

15 (2) (A) The unit head shall develop a training module on assisting

16 and serving women veterans with regard to state or federal services or
17 benefits and identifying and advising such veterans of community or
18 nonprofit programs focused on assisting and serving such veterans.
19 The unit head shall hold and provide instruction for an annual training
20 session, in accordance with such module, to each veterans' services
21 officer and any veterans' service contact person, as described in
22 subsection (b) of section 27-135, as amended by this act, or
23 representative from an Operation Academic Support for Incoming
24 Service Members center at a public institution of higher education in
25 this state.

26 (B) At least one of the service officers shall be a woman having a
27 demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who shall be
28 responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon the next
29 opening of a service officer position occurring on or after July 1, 2010,
30 at least two of the service officers shall be individuals having bilingual
31 proficiency in English and Spanish, within existing authorized
32 positions. Each service officer shall (i) successfully complete a course in
33 veterans' benefits within one year of commencement of employment,
34 [and shall] (ii) attend the training session described in subparagraph
35 (A) of this subdivision, and (iii) be assigned to one of the five
36 congressional districts of the state.

37 (C) The unit head shall employ a women veterans coordinator to
38 provide centralized administrative support to each veterans' service
39 officer in matters concerning female veterans, including, but not
40 limited to, compiling and distributing information, acting as a liaison
41 between state and federal agencies in identifying services and benefits
42 and developing outreach opportunities. The women veterans
43 coordinator shall also support the efforts of Operation Academic
44 Support for Incoming Service Members centers at public institutions of
45 higher education in this state.

46 (c) In addition to the powers and duties prescribed under section 4-
47 8, the commissioner shall have the following powers and duties:

48 (1) To prepare studies and collect information concerning facilities
49 and services available to members of the armed forces, veterans, their
50 spouses or eligible dependents, including facilities and services for
51 veterans who may have been exposed to a Vietnam herbicide during
52 their periods of military service;

53 (2) To conduct interviews in the nursing homes or hospitals
54 throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted
55 and ascertaining which benefits such veterans are currently receiving
56 and are entitled to receive;

57 (3) To cooperate with service agencies and organizations
58 throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and
59 assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been
60 members of the armed forces, their spouses or eligible dependents,
61 which will indicate the availability of: (A) Educational training and
62 retraining facilities; (B) health, medical, rehabilitation and housing
63 services and facilities; (C) employment and reemployment services; (D)
64 provisions of federal, state and local laws affording financial rights,
65 privileges and benefits; and (E) other matters of similar nature;

66 (4) To assist veterans, their spouses and eligible dependents and
67 family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and
68 establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits
69 accruing to them under federal, state and local laws;

70 (5) To cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and
71 private agencies securing or offering services or any benefits to
72 veterans, their spouses or dependents;

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

75 (7) To review all appeals made by veterans, their spouses or eligible
76 dependents or family members and render the final decision thereon
77 regarding the denial of admission to any program or the refusal to

78 render any service or benefit which is administered by the Department
79 of Veterans' Affairs, the discharge or transfer from any such program
80 or any disciplinary action taken while participating in any such
81 program; [and]

82 (8) If the Veterans' Home closes or ceases to provide housing to
83 veterans, to provide or arrange for housing to any veteran residing at
84 the home or the health care facility within the home on the date of such
85 closure or on the date the Veterans' Home ceases to provide housing to
86 veterans; and

87 (9) To develop a quick reference guide with extensive and reliable
88 data regarding female veterans, including, but not limited to, federal
89 and state services and benefits, current challenges and notable female
90 veterans and their contributions, and make such guide available to
91 members of the General Assembly and employees of state agencies.

92 Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 27-135 of the general statutes is
93 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective*
94 *October 1, 2016*):

95 (b) Any city or town that (1) has not established its own local
96 veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other cities or
97 towns pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, and (2) does not
98 otherwise provide funding for a veterans' service officer shall
99 designate a city or town employee to serve as a veterans' service
100 contact person in such city or town. Any city or town employee
101 designated as a veterans' service contact person shall carry out the
102 duties described in subsection (a) of this section and may complete an
103 annual training course conducted by the veterans' advocacy and
104 assistance unit, as described in subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of
105 section 27-102l, as amended by this act, or attend a training session
106 conducted by the unit head of said unit, as described in subparagraph
107 (A) of subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of said section, as amended by
108 this act.

109 Sec. 3. Subsection (a) of section 27-109a of the general statutes is
110 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective*
111 *October 1, 2016*):

112 (a) The Department of Veterans' Affairs may establish and maintain,
113 within available resources, a registry of data on members of the armed
114 forces, as defined in section 27-103, who have completed a period of
115 active service. The department may develop surveys for members or
116 their health care providers to voluntarily provide data during or after
117 such active service. The surveys and data shall be collected and
118 maintained in accordance with the requirements of the federal Health
119 Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-191)
120 (HIPAA), as amended from time to time, or regulations adopted
121 thereunder. The department may also create and release for radio and
122 television broadcast noncommercial sustaining announcements to
123 encourage veterans in the state to participate in such surveys, provide
124 such data and otherwise enroll in such registry. For purposes of this
125 section, "noncommercial sustaining announcement" means an
126 announcement that airs during unsold commercial time donated by a
127 broadcaster to a broadcasters' association and that is then made
128 available to a state or federal government agency or nonprofit
129 organization at a reduced rate for the promotion of specific public
130 service programs or campaigns.

131 Sec. 4. Subsection (a) of section 27-100f of the general statutes is
132 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective*
133 *October 1, 2016*):

134 (a) (1) On or before July 1, 2012, the Department of Veterans' Affairs
135 shall publish on the department's Internet web site an informational
136 page listing any benefits, services or programs offered to veterans or
137 their families by any state or federal agency, department or institution.
138 The department shall maintain the informational page after said date
139 and shall update the informational page annually. The department
140 shall publish on the informational page any information concerning

141 the eligibility requirements and application process for such benefits,
142 services or programs, the name and contact information of any entity
143 offering such benefits, services or programs, and a link to the Internet
144 web site for such entity.

145 (2) The department shall also publish upon such Internet web site a
146 page dedicated to matters of concern for women veterans. The page
147 shall list any relevant information and links to services and benefits for
148 which such veterans may be eligible. The women veterans coordinator,
149 as described in subparagraph (C) of subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of
150 section 27-102l, as amended by this act, shall manage the dedicated
151 women veterans page that shall include such coordinator's direct
152 contact information for purposes of providing front-line support and
153 assistance, as described in said subparagraph.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>October 1, 2016</i>	27-102l(b) and (c)
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2016</i>	27-135(b)
Sec. 3	<i>October 1, 2016</i>	27-109a(a)
Sec. 4	<i>October 1, 2016</i>	27-100f(a)

Statement of Purpose:

To continue building awareness of women veterans' issues and address their unique needs by expanding opportunities for outreach and support by the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

[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.]