



# Senate

General Assembly

**File No. 97**

February Session, 2016

Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

*Senate, March 21, 2016*

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs reported through SEN. FLEXER of the 29th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

## ***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2 supplement to the general statutes are repealed and the following is  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 women 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 women veterans, including, but not limited to, federal  
89 and state services and benefits, current challenges and notable women  
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 27-102I, 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	October 1, 2016	27-102l(b) and (c)
Sec. 2	October 1, 2016	27-135(b)
Sec. 3	October 1, 2016	27-109a(a)
Sec. 4	October 1, 2016	27-100f(a)

**Statement of Legislative Commissioners:**

In Section 1(b)(2)(C) and (c)(9), "women" was substituted for "female" for consistency.

**VA**            *Joint Favorable Subst. -LCO*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

**OFA Fiscal Note**

**State Impact:**

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 17 \$	FY 18 \$
Department of Veterans' Affairs	GF - Cost	53,423	69,864
Comptroller Misc. Accounts (Fringe Benefits) <sup>1</sup>	GF - Cost	20,898	27,864

Note: GF=General Fund

**Municipal Impact:** None

**Explanation**

The bill requires the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) to employ a women veterans coordinator, which results in a state cost of approximately \$74,321 in FY 17 and \$97,728 in FY 18. The first fiscal year (FY) amount reflects coordinator salary (\$52,323) and fringe benefit expenses (\$20,898) for nine months of FY 17 (the bill is effective 10/1/16). FY 18 costs reflect annualized salary (\$69,764 is the mid-range salary for a Veterans Services Officer) and fringe benefit expenses (\$27,864).<sup>1</sup> Other Expenses of \$1,100 are reflected in FY 17 for a computer and software (\$1,000—one-time), and general office supplies (\$100—on going). It is anticipated that the women veterans coordinator will, along with the completion of other specified tasks, develop a quick reference guide for members of the General Assembly and state agency employees (anticipated to be posted online, not printed). There is no fiscal impact associated with giving DVA the authority to create, and release, noncommercial sustaining announcements. The bill does not require DVA to do so. Further, there

<sup>1</sup>The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is 39.94% of payroll in FY 17 and FY 18.

is no fiscal impact with the provision establishing a dedicated women veterans' web page, to be managed by the coordinator.

***The Out Years***

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation.

**OLR Bill Analysis****SB 205*****AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS.*****SUMMARY:**

This bill requires the head of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) veterans' advocacy and assistance unit to develop training on serving women veterans and employ a women veterans coordinator. DVA must also develop a reference guide with extensive and reliable data regarding women veterans and publish on its website a page dedicated to matters concerning women veterans.

The bill allows DVA to create and release noncommercial radio and television broadcast announcements to encourage veterans in the state to participate in surveys, provide data, or enroll in a DVA-established registry. By law, DVA may (1) establish and maintain a data registry on members of the armed forces who have completed a period of active service and (2) develop surveys for members or their health care providers to provide data during or after active service. Noncommercial announcements are those that air during unsold commercial time that a broadcaster donates to a broadcasters' association and then made available to a state or federal government agency or nonprofit organization at a reduced rate to promote specific public service programs or campaigns.

The bill also makes minor and technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2016

**WOMEN VETERANS*****Training***

Under the bill, the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit head must develop a training module on assisting and serving women veterans

on state or federal services or benefits and identifying and advising such veterans of community or nonprofit programs that assist and serve them.

The unit head must hold and provide instruction for an annual training session to each veterans' services officer and any veterans' service contact person or representative from an Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service (OASIS) Members center at an in-state public institution of higher education. OASIS centers provide programming and services focused on outreach and assistance to students who are veterans enrolled at such institutions.

The bill requires veterans' service officers, and authorizes veterans' service contacts, to complete this training.

### ***Reference Guide***

The bill requires the DVA commissioner to develop a quick reference guide with extensive and reliable data on women veterans. The guide must (1) include information on federal and state services and benefits, current challenges, and notable women veterans and their contributions and (2) be made available to members of the General Assembly and state agency employees.

### ***Women Veterans Coordinator***

The bill requires the unit head to employ a women veterans coordinator to provide centralized administrative support to each veterans' service office in matters concerning women veterans. This includes compiling and distributing information, acting as a liaison between state and federal agencies in identifying service and benefits, and developing outreach opportunities. The coordinator must also support the efforts of OASIS centers.

### ***Website***

The bill requires DVA to publish on its website a page dedicated to matters concerning women veterans. The page must list any relevant information and links to services and benefits for which women veterans may be eligible. The women veterans coordinator must

manage the dedicated women veterans page, which must include his or her direct contact information in order to provide front-line support and assistance.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Veterans' Affairs Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 13 Nay 0 (03/03/2016)