Department of Veterans' Affairs Testimony to the Veterans' Affairs' Committee
March 3, 2016
S.B. 2, S.B. 320, H.B. 5413 HB5415

Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessey, ranking and esteemed members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee:

I am Sean Connolly, Commissioner of the State Department of Veterans' Affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on S.B. 320, H.B. 5413 and HB 5415 and want to thank you for your service on behalf of Connecticut's citizens, especially our Connecticut Veterans.

Since my appointment as Commissioner, we have worked to update DVA programs and procedures so that we may better deliver our core services of long-term chronic disease healthcare, residential and rehabilitative services, and advocacy and assistance for Veterans and eligible dependents through the hard work and dedication of the DVA staff, interns, volunteers and new partnerships with federal, state and local agencies and non-profit organizations.

S.B. 320, An Act Concerning Charities Soliciting On Behalf Of Veterans:

The Department appreciates the intent of this legislation, however, there are serious concerns with this bill. Existing law requires the Department to publish a list of "qualified veterans' charitable organizations" based on certain criteria which could be viewed as an endorsement of the listed organization by the State and assurance of the good intentions of the listed organizations. Requiring the Department to conduct a detailed financial review of the organizations to include charity accountability standards, determine whether they have violated any provisions of the Solicitation of Charitable Funds Act and then determine whether to list the organization as qualified veterans' charitable organizations is of more concern. Passage of this bill would require not only re-allocation of staff from their regular duties of working directly with Veteran clients but would also require the hiring of a charities financial specialist.

I ask that you re-consider this bill and note that residents may currently search all lawfully registered charities and solicitors at the Department of Consumer Protection website and find financial information on websites that conduct detailed reviews and rate charities.

H.B. 5413 – An Act Concerning Housing for Veterans and Active Duty Military Personnel:

The Department has been working with state and federal agencies including the Connecticut Department of Housing and Federal VA to provide coordinated temporary and long-term housing opportunities to our state's Veterans. The study and reporting requirements in this bill would be redundant of existing efforts and require re-allocation of limited resources currently providing services to our state's Veterans.

H.B. 5415, An Act Concerning Transportation For Veterans:

The Department currently provides transportation of varied types to our Veteran Residents to and from the Rocky Hill campus. The requirement to establish a new program to issue vouchers to travel to medical appointments to Veterans statewide who demonstrate financial hardship is concerning. Such a program would require the Department to obtain and review military discharge documents, sensitive financial information, determine whether there is a need and verify that the Veteran requires transportation to a medical appointment; such information could also implicate HIPPA compliance.

I respectfully ask for reconsideration of SB 320, HB 5413 and HB 5415, given the current resources and the necessary focus on our Core missions of providing long-term chronic disease healthcare, residential and rehabilitative services, and advocacy and assistance for Veterans and eligible dependents, the Department cannot perform these tasks without additional staff and funding.

Thank you for your time and interest in supporting Connecticut's Veterans. I am happy to respond to questions.