

Veterans' Affairs Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-288

AN ACT EXPANDING CERTAIN VETERANS' ACCESS TO PUBLIC

Title: ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

Vote Date: 3/14/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/6/2018

File No.: 163

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' Affairs Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would help certain veterans become eligible for greater social service benefits by exempting all pension benefits issued by the Veterans Administration when determining their income level. It would also amend the state Medicaid plan to exempt those benefits from certain veterans' income eligibility determinations.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Connecticut Department of Social Services

DSS opposes the bill as the agency said the bill would increase eligibility, caseloads and state expenditures with no means to address them. "The required funds for such increases are not in place or available at this time. Given the current fiscal climate, it is not anticipated that there will be funds in the budget to support these additions," the department said. DSS further noted that an "aid and attendance pension disregard" with respect to VA benefits is already in place.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kelly, Kevin, State Senator (21st)

Sen. Kelly said the bill would help "protect our vulnerable, senior population and ultimately helps seniors age in place." He said the state should disregard all non-service related

pension income for veterans as it will enable seniors to avoid entering a nursing home, which ends up being much more costly for the state.

Stillman, Matthew T., past president, Connecticut Chapter of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys (CTNAELA)

CTNAELA supports the exemption of medical expense reimbursements from income, allowing more veterans to qualify for public assistance programs. He said the bill is needed because DSS administratively modified their policies to only exempt a portion of the VA's Aid and Attendance Pension of veteran's income from benefits calculation. This means some veterans are not able to qualify for social service benefits that would help them stay in the homes rather than seeking institutional care. He noted that the reimbursements would be specifically for medical expenses and are paid entirely from federal (non-Connecticut) funds.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None

Reported by: D.G. Fisher, Assistant Clerk

Date: April 3, 2018