



## CONNECTICUT VETERANS & MILITARY COALITION

c/o Officers and Enlisted Club of Connecticut, 360 Broad St., Hartford, CT 06105

Good morning Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, Senator Abrams, Representative Boyd and members of the Veterans Affairs Committee.

I am Dan Thurston, Chairman of the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition.

I am here today to speak on behalf of the Veterans and their families of this State with regard to several bills that are being considered in this Legislative year.

We are **opposing Bill 7137** to create and manage a program, under the Department of Veterans Affairs, making drivers available to get veterans to and from appointments and interviews. The Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) in each of the congressional districts do not have the staff to provide these services and the implementation of this bill would take them away from their regular duties of providing needed services to veterans.

We **support Bill 7134** providing free public bus transportation for veterans.

Bill 7134 will help some veterans get to and from appointments provided they have access to public transportation. The Veterans Service Organizations, such as the DAV, have vehicles available but lack sufficient volunteers to meet the transportation needs. Recruiting and training volunteers to fill this need would be much better solution than hiring drivers that would work for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

At the February 14, 2019 Public Hearing I touched on the issue of helping returning veterans reconnect with the community. There are several bills being considered that can facilitate the transition from military service to community service. They are as follows:

We **support Bill 949** which would authorize bonds for The Harry Ruffin, Jr. American Legion Post 206. The creation of a centralized business incubator not only for veterans but also the community at large can pay dividends to the State of Connecticut.

Connecticut once took pride in the small businesses that not only provided goods and services to the citizens but also to the corporations that provides heavy machinery, aircraft parts and submarines. Starting a small business is a challenge. Providing this location, services and mentors to budding entrepreneurs can put them on the right track to success. New businesses increase economic activity and strengthen the economy of the state. This is a wise investment.

Another positive is the creation of a Veterans Outreach Center. Centrally located, this facility can provide the means to connect veterans with veterans.

We **support Bill 862** providing consideration to Veteran-Owned Businesses in State Contracting. This bill again complements SB-949 and is an incentive for veterans to consider business models that serve our state and its communities.

We **support Bill 968** establishing a Military to Machinists Job Training Program for Veterans and Senate **Bill 951** to prioritize Veteran Enrollment in Alternate Route to Certification Programs. These programs provide the opportunity for veterans to adapt the skills and experience they acquired in service to our nation to careers for their future.

We **support Bill 7138** establishing a study of Veterans' Services offered by Oasis centers. These centers were started by the Women's Clubs of Connecticut in conjunction with Veterans Service Organizations. They provide a common meeting, study and recreational location for veterans. I would recommend that the foundation of this study come from the current generation of veterans and suggest that the Harry Ruffin, Jr. Convention Center become a focal point for veterans' events.

We **support Bill 7247** that will provide Access to Veterans' Resource Information. If any of the forgoing bills are important, then Veterans Outreach should be at the top of the list. Our greatest challenge is to make every veteran aware of the programs and services that Connecticut and its Veterans Organization have to offer.



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In addition we support the following bills that will benefit all veterans:

We **support Bill 781** eliminating fees for Certified Copies of Vital Records sought in Connection with The Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund. No Veteran should have to pay to access benefits to which they are entitled.

We **support Bill 861** correcting Connecticut State Statutes for the definition of "Service in Time of War" and state Residency Requirements for certain Veterans' Services.

We **support Bill 950** establishing a Veterans' Cemetery Account. The Federal Government provides a large percentage of the funding to operate and maintain the Veterans Cemeteries and its use should be restricted for that purpose.

We **support Bill 7136** Exempting Veterans from the Passport to the Parks Motor Vehicle Registration Program Fee.

We **support Bill 7248** Concerning In-State Student Status for Spouses and Children of certain members of The Armed Forces.

On behalf of the Veterans of Connecticut and their families, I thank you for your time to allow me to express our views and for your commitment to the Veterans and Citizens of Connecticut. This concludes my testimony and I am available for any questions you may have.

Respectful Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dan Thurston', is written over a faint, larger version of the same signature.

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