SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Good Morning. I’d like call this public hearing for the Veterans’ Affairs Committee to order. Before we get started, I just need to make the safety announcement. In the interest of safety, I’d like you to note the location and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors through which you entered the room are the emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, proceed to the main stairs or follow the exit signs to one of the fire stairs. Please quickly exit the building and follow any instructions from the Capitol Police. Do not delay and do not return unless and until you are advised it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors, and seek concealment behind desks and chairs until an all-clear announcement is heard. With that, we’ll get started and first, I would like to call up Commissioner Saadi to testify and also we would like to wish him good luck, as we understand you have to go to your hearing at Executive Nominations after this.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Yes, Senator, good morning.
SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Good morning.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you very much. My name is Thomas J. Saadi. I’m the commissioner of the State Department of Veteran’s Affairs, also known as the DVA. I thank you for the opportunity to address you here today, but I also want to thank our veterans who are here today and service members across our state and our nation for their selfless service and sacrifice on our behalf. While the department supports many of the committee’s raised bills, my testimony will focus on two bills directly related to our impact in the department’s operations and programs and services.

The first is House Bill 7064, AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL VETERANS REPRESENTATIVES. The department thanks the committee for raising this bill which seeks to update the name of municipal veterans’ service contact persons to municipal veterans’ representatives, which is a commonly utilized term. It is also -- This bill would also allow volunteers to serve as said municipal veterans’ representatives, in addition to municipal veterans’ commissions and/or employees of municipalities. This program is administered by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ which provides the training to these municipally-based contacts who are important partners with the DVA in connecting our veterans to the programs and services that they have earned. There is an armed position, no fiscal impact, and the volunteers in this proposal would either have to be veterans themselves or otherwise familiar with veterans’ benefits. Not in my written testimony, but another item I would like to point out in the bill is something that did not introduce, but in speaking with my director of advocacy and assistance
who oversees the training of these municipal veterans’ contacts, is currently they’re required to engage in a mandatory training session within one year of appointment and that all training thereafter may be sent to them or updates electronically. We would ask the committee to consider possibly, in a substitute language, that there be a requirement that they receive the training from the department annually, as there are consistent changes each year to both and state and federal programs and services and while we will continue to send out electronic updates, it is often very helpful to have a live presentation as well as discussion to answer questions, so I would ask that the committee consider that possibility.

The second bill is House Bill 6775, AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY FAMILIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. As commissioner, I often find that the problem is not a lack of programs and services, but instead the failure to connect eligible persons with available programs and services. This bill is a fiscally neutral means to ensure that students in a military family are connected with existing, supportive resources for military families. The recommended student identifier also can assist schools in the delivery of their support of students -- their support of services to students of military families who experience unique circumstances, including extended absences of parents or siblings for training and deployments that could be to hostile regions and the adjustment period for those family members when they return home. School staff will have to have a basic level of knowledge of available resources in order to make such referrals and the DVA stands ready to provide the information as may
be needed to municipal boards of education and other education points of contact. I thank you for your time, for your service to our state, support of our veterans, and I’m happy to respond to any questions you may have.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Does anyone have any questions for Commissioner Saadi? Okay, Representative Borer.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, Commissioner, and good luck today.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Just a couple quick questions, on Bill 7064, is there anything in the statutes now that prohibits the municipality from assigning a volunteer to perform these duties?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: There is not an affirmative statement that they cannot do it, but the statute currently enumerates those who are eligible to serve in that position, so by inference, it is prohibitive.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, and I would imagine that by putting in the training, some more specifics around the training, it also gives you the opportunity to have a little bit more of a framework as to the education and the current -- for these volunteers so that they’re current and up to date on resources?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Absolutely. The training is also an opportunity to expand the training to include other state agencies and do cross training with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Labor, and Department of Public Health
have been partners in this and they also allow for collaboration across municipal jurisdictions. This way municipalities that have unique situations can share how they solved the problems with other municipalities who may be running into those issues, so we find that the annual training is very important, not just for getting out the updates on state and federal programs and services, but also allowing the dialog, the cross municipal dialog and cross agency dialog, to try to address problems that individuals encounter in providing services and programs to veterans.

REP. BORER (115TH): And it also creates a network for those individuals to reach out to each other? Is that part of the process?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Yes, it is. In fact, the DVA developed, we developed over the last couple of years the listing of all the municipal veterans’ service points of contact within municipalities. We have them broken up by congressional district and this way we can refer them to each other, but it’s also very helpful to have them at the training and I can tell you, it will be no additional cost, whether we’re training 30 people or training 130, it’s the same cost because we put together this same training package.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, and then my other question on the 6775, AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY FAMILIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS, what form -- is that their registration form? Where would they identify that they’re part of a military family?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: My understanding is that when they’re registering for school, there are certain identifiers or information that is gathered. I
don’t know the technical details of that, but that would go to the school system. I don’t believe it is part of public record that can be released as protected from FOIA, but that is my understanding. I can tell that when I first heard about this about a year and a half ago, it was from the spouse of a reserve soldier who was deployed multiple times and she is also a mother of a child in school and indicated that it would have been very helpful of the teachers and administrators knew from information that they had gathered that her son, as well as one or two others in this school, had this connection. I think it’s a very different dynamic when you’re dealing with reserve and National Guard personnel versus active component personnel who are on an active military base or near one because of the services there and everyone assumes that being – who they are and connect them directly. When you’re in a public school system, people don’t assume that you’re the child of a service member or the sibling of a service member and also very unique challenges for guard and reserve, who care citizen soldiers and citizen armed forces members and have multiple deployments, particularly in this high operations tempo.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, thank you. I think it’s a great idea. I look forward to learning more about how that process will work to make sure that information gets into the hands of the right personnel, the school nurses, the school counselors, the teachers. I think we’ve just got to vet it out a little bit.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Yes, Representative, my understanding is that there are multiple identifiers currently that are gathered and that those are
shared. This would follow that same template. It would just be an additional indicator or some identifier for the purposes of those who either -- whether it’s clinicians or other supportive services within the school and to make the appropriate referrals to existing resources at the state and federal level. This is not the creation of any additional programs or services, but again connecting those who are eligible for those services.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great, so thank you. Just one more question, so it also identifies those children and alert the staff as to who those children are, but also give them opportunity for the staff to better understand what those resources are to connect the children to?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Absolutely. Again, the Department of Veterans' Affairs can provide that information to our municipal-based resources, again going back to the previous bill, the municipal veterans’ service points of contact, can assist us in that process as well and that is something we can do within existing appropriations, I mean, without a regulatory scheme, but something that we can provide.

REP. BORER (115TH): It’s a great opportunity. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.


SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): Thank you very much. I also wanted to talk about House Bill 6775. I am a former public school administrator and I think this is an incredible idea because having an alliance between
your department and the schools to support the students who may be struggling or having issues unique to their family situation in terms of serving our country is a great idea. There is, when parents register their children, there is a part of the form that asks for occupation, so that would be an easy place to put that down, that, you know, whether or not it’s their full-time occupation or if they’re in the reserve, they could also list that there, and I think just knowing that those resources are available to guidance staff to reach out and know that there might be, you know, just somebody to connect to, to say how might I best help this family or this student. I just think it’s an incredible idea, so I wish somebody had thought of it sooner, that’s all. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Senator, and just to, you know, ensure the committee that the Connecticut National Guard, the Department of Defense, and the federal VA have a multitude of these services that the state’s Department of Veterans’ Affairs is not the primary provider of these supportive services, but we could provide the connection, provide the information, and it could come from not only the spouse of a reserve soldier, but he was also formerly of the Connecticut National Guard.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Representative Ferraro.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Commissioner Saadi, always great to see you. Love working with you. You work really hard and you do a great job for our veterans. Thank you very much and Happy Valentine’s Day to you.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: To you, as well.
REP. FERRARO (117TH): I just have one question regarding the school identifier, student identifier, I may have missed it because I did come late, but H.B. 6775, you speak about a student identifier whose job, I guess, would be to assist these families in connecting them with these resources. My question would be is there just one student identifier located in a central office connected with the VA administration or would this person be embedded in schools?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Representative, very good question to allow me to clarify that the identifier is an indication on a document. It’s not a particular person or office.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Okay.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: And that identifier would be shared with existing staff, whether -- within the school administration, so there’s not the creation of a new office. It is simply an identifier within existing documentation to add to other identifiers in registration documents.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Commissioner. That was the only question I had. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Are there any other questions for the commissioner? Okay, if not, thank you very much and good luck.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Senator, I appreciate your time.
SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you for your time. Next we are going to call General Evon. Good morning, General.

GENERAL EVON: Good morning, committee co-chairs, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, and distinguished members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I’m Major General Fran Evon, the adjutant general of the state of Connecticut and I’d like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Here with me today are Brigadier General Jerry MacDonald, the assistant adjutant general of the state of Connecticut, Colonel Timothy Tomcho, our state judge advocate, and Captain Eric Heinonen, new dad and our legislative liaison. I’ve submitted my written testimony in support of the military’s departments two bills that will be heard by the committee during this public hearing and rather than read the testimony, I’d like to highlight the most important aspects of the two bills under consideration, Senate Bill, 800, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MEDAL OF MERIT FOR CIVILIANS, and House Bill 7063, AN ACT CONCERNING LEASING OF MILITARY DEPARTMENT FACILITIES. I will address each in turn.

With Senate Bill 800, the military department seeks to establish the civilian medal of merit. In order to provide an appropriate means of recognizing members of the civilian community who significantly contribute to the accomplishment of the mission of the armed forces of the state. Two of my top priorities as adjutant general are recruiting and retention of qualified personnel into the ranks of our armed forces and also community engagement and outreach. I believe the two go hand in hand. By engaging our civilian community partners and stakeholders, it is my goal to build not only
exposure for our organization, but to develop mutually beneficial relationships as each accomplish each other -- help each other accomplish our collective goals.

One example is two weeks ago, both Yale University and Central Connecticut University partnered with the military department to develop a fitness improvement program designed to assist our soldiers and airmen in achieving personal and military fitness standards through a holistic approach, physical, nutritional, and mental lifestyle changes. In January of this year, we held our first 12-day session under the program. We had 37 soldiers and airmen successfully complete the program and our collaboration with Yale and Central specifically helped us fill gaps, so for instance, I do not have on any of our Manning documents or even on the state side a nutritionist, so Yale and Central were able to bring that capability into our program and assist our soldiers, the next step will be their families, in creating a really a new culture change to better the wellness of the program.

A state military award, which we’re talking about right now, recognizing our civilian community partners, like those volunteers that I spoke of, would contribute to the accomplishment of the mission of the armed forces of the state and help to ensure their continued support and is in keeping with military customs, courtesies, and traditions.

The second bill I will speak is House Bill 7063. It also serves as nominal recruiting and retention benefit for members of our armed forces. Current statute provisions do not provide the authority for our members to lease military facilities to
celebrate their significant personal military achievements, such as promotion or retirement, however, our active duty counterparts are usually afforded the benefit on active duty installations. By providing this authority, our members will be placed on parity with their active duty brethren and will be able to celebrate their achievements in familiar surroundings with those who have supported them throughout their endeavors with a limited to no cost to the state.

As your new adjutant general, I’d also like to extend my appreciation to the committee support for our military veterans throughout the state. Because of this support and the creation of programs like the Military Relief Fund, the military department was able to provide grants to 37 members and family members of the United States Coast Guard so Connecticut residents serving the Coast Guard, we were able to issue grants totaling over $110,000 dollars to those who suffered financial hardships during the recent government shutdown. So I’d like to thank you for your support of that program. I’d like to thank you for your time and consideration of these two important military matters and I’m here to answer any questions if necessary. Thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much, General. Are there any questions? Representative.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Good morning and welcome. I just wanted to comment quickly that I recently reached out to your staff with some questions constituents had regarding the Putnam Readiness Center that’s in the docket there and you guys were great at getting right back to us and I, you know, northeastern Connecticut hasn’t had a military presence in a
while since the armory closed in our late ‘90’s now, so it’s an excitement to be able to reuse some state land that’s been vacant for a while, so I just wanted to compliment you and your staff for being out there and helping engage the community, so thank you.

GENERAL EVON: Thank you, sir.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Are there any other questions for the generals? Thank you very much.

GENERAL EVON: We are also very supportive. We have a great relationship with the commissioner and we’re wishing him luck as well today. Thank you very much.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Next, Senators Formica and Kelley -- Okay, we’ll come back to him. Senator Kissel and Susan Regan. Good morning, Senator. Would you please turn on the microphone?

SEN. KISSEL (7TH): Good morning, Chairman Maroney, Chairman Borer, Ranking Member Logan, Ranking Member Vail, and esteemed members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I’m state senator John Kissel, serving the good people in seven communities in north central Connecticut. I’m here with Susan Regan regarding a bill that was proposed last year and once again this year, Senate Bill 543, and Ms. Regan comes from the great town of Granby and I’ll turn it over to Ms. Regan at this time.

SUSAN REGAN: Thank you, Senator Kissel, I appreciate it, and thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to speak to you today. Happy Valentine’s Day to you and I hope you have the heart to pass this bill. I am Susan Patricelli-Regan. I am president of Foxfield F.A.R.M. Foundation and my
husband, Bill Regan, is here today and he is vice-president of our 501C3. It stands -- The F.A.R.M. is F.A.R.M., which is Four A Recovery Mission. This is a -- The statement of purpose is to require a health insurance coverage for equine therapy for veterans and the Chapter 700C of the general statutes be amended to require health insurance coverage for equine therapy for veterans.

I will start out with non-maleficence, which is derived from the maxim, it is one of the principal precepts of bioethics, with is the ethics of medical and biological research and that all medical students are taught in school and its fundamental principle throughout the world. Another way to state it is that giving an existing problem, it may be better to do something or even to do nothing than to risk causing more harm than good. Now I will start out with, and this is not an attack on, this is just pointing out what I believe are the facts that exist today; classical approach detriments to PTSD. Thus far in the treatment of PTSD and related mental issues via medical, psychotherapy, and prescriptive applications have not proven to be the silver bullet as the panacea for treating this disorder.

Veterans have in many cases ceased or avoided the clinical approach due to its personally invasive but dispassionate structure. Veterans are proud of their service to our country and don’t want the shame of being observed as a mental patient. This is true to first responders, I may say. This is reticence of the current veteran PSTD population to participate in standards approaches for concern for opioid addiction leading to further risks of increased depression, isolation, and suicide. This
can result in self-medication through alcohol abuse. Given the rate of returning veterans with PTSD syndrome is recognized as a growing epidemic. Germane to the above are direct costs associated with treating PTSD, which include psychotherapy and the pharmacotherapy, but ancillary funding is needed for annual operating costs of salary, bonuses, and incentives, additional staff, training and hiring costs, information technology requisites, and administrative charges.

While traditional rehabilitation treatments have recorded varying success rates, they are assessed and monitored with electronic health records over a long period of time, but the readings do not really evaluate the veteran’s actual internal mental wellness barometer, so critical to ascertaining actual better quality of life rates. Now the benefits of equine therapy, based on the organic nature of creating mutual respect synergy between human and equine and learned safety, there is no harm in this approach. In fact, the person may have had a fear of such a large animal actually learns to relax, gains personal confidence, adds a trade skill that can actually transfer to job opportunities, or provides a basis for extension to horse ownership or equestrian sports pursuits. I will interject something there that we also have a relationship with the First Company Governor’s Horse Guard so that they can pursue with them after they have learned the trade skill with us, they can work for them, they can work with them, and they can join the guard actually at reduced rates than they normally would charge for a membership.

The only addictive aspect in equine therapy is that once the participant is acquiring a satisfying sense
of improvement within the program is that they want to continue beyond our six-week curriculum, proving that there is true enjoyment while on the path to a sense of normalcy and mental equilibrium. Because the veteran is immersed in activity diversity sessions, they realize that they are contributing to the horse’s welfare. This redefines the feeling of being a PTSD victim syndrome and thus can relinquish the shame and embarrassment in that association. The horses are the nurses and are the interpreters of the patient’s temperament and with groundwork equine therapy, the instructor guides and directs the participant to literally understand how the horse sees the world, interpret its body language, while forming a synergy of trust.

Animals are not judgmental in the human sense and therefore the clinical public PTSD stigma is absent from this equation. Veterans are proud to say they are participating in the equestrian industry as it shows courage, it’s informative, it broadens their horizons, and it has a cache that elevates their personal esteem. The metrics of success are directly reflected in the verbiage provided by the veterans as they progress through the curriculum; provision of improvements in their personal relationships, professional development, reduction in depression, and reliance on prescription drugs. These advantages are rhetorically offered by the veterans and noted in their surveys submitted post the six-week program and often shared during their sessions, the typical brain scans and repetitive psychiatric interviews, which often only reinstate their anxiety.

Costs are reduced with fewer potential doctor/psychiatric visits, dependence on
prescriptions, and potential need for additional corrective measures should the opioid/alcohol abuse occur. Overall session costs are more cost efficient, effective than a medical visit. In summary --

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Excuse me, Ms. Regan, we have a three-minute limit on testimony, if you could, please summarize.

SUSAN REGAN: I can end there if you would like because you do have this in stated form, so you any questions that you have.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Happy Valentine’s, good morning. How many farms in Connecticut provide equine therapy?

SUSAN REGAN: I wouldn’t be able to state that exactly correctly. I’m going to estimate there are probably two or three other farms that often something along this, but what segregates us from them is that we focus on veterans.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay.

SUSAN REGAN: I do not have a commercial barn. I do not -- we only -- I have actually turned over all of my polo horses to the foundation for the purpose of using them for this program. Polo horses happen to be a very specific breed that’s good for this type of therapy and so therefore we focus whereas they still give lessons and other things are going on.

REP. VAIL (52ND): The cost associated, so if this would be an insurance mandate which would then be born by the payers because it’s outside of the
Affordable Care Act, so when we do a mandate, then the municipalities, the businesses, they’re going to have to shoulder that. Do you -- What would be the cost for an average visit? Like what would be the payment from an insurance company?

SUSAN REGAN: Okay, it would be actually -- they are usually two-hour sessions. It ends at being approximately $70 dollars an hour. Overall, it’s $840 dollars for a six-week session.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. And after that, I know you mentioned some of it, after the six-week session is up, is there like maintenance visits, things like that, to make sure that the -- or are they done after six weeks?

SUSAN REGAN: They ask to come back, they actually want to come and live on our farm, so it depends on how many programs we have going at once. If we have time to give them additional sessions, we could do that.

REP. VAIL (52ND): But would that -- would you be looking to require that debt be paid for as well by insurance companies? Would that be medically necessary or would that be more elective?

SUSAN REGAN: I would say I am so concerned that we give this opportunity, I would say we could probably allow at least two extra sessions without pay.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay.

SUSAN REGAN: We -- Oh, I just want to say that we do have the sharing prior to going into the session. We ask them to sit down in our lounge. We ask them if they would like to have -- share anything with us, we don’t force anything upon them. Many times
they share things with us they do not share with their doctors or their psychiatrists, their feeling of relax-ness comes immediately, and then we have a session afterwards and go over what we do that day and have the option to call us to talk to us about things.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay, thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Representative Ferraro.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ma’am, for the good work that you’re doing.

SUSAN REGAN: Thank you.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): I just have a question regarding the population that you anticipate on a yearly basis, how many veterans that would qualify for this program are you anticipating?

SUSAN REGAN: Given what I would say the capacity that we can handle, we would normally do this two times a week. We like to do it, if at all possible, two people at a time. We feel we can focus on the people personally that way between the horses, my husband, and myself. We do not employ any employees and we do not have any volunteers to help us. We do all of the instruction, so I would say that given the eight months of good weather, we could probably handle a maximum of 200 veterans.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): I appreciate that and do you feel that you will reach those numbers? Is that something you think is reasonable?

SUSAN REGAN: If the veterans committee gives us the opportunity to reach out as to the adjutant general who was here today. The focus is on giving this
opportunity to the veterans through you. My husband and I have spent considerable hours, days, weeks, reaching out to all of the veterans’ commissions that we can. We need to reach the veterans directly, not intermediary. Once they get a feeling of how successful this could be for them, they come.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you very much and thank you, Mr. Chair.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you, Representative Ferraro. Representative Wood and then Representative Rose.

REP. WOOD (29TH): Hi, good morning. Can you just walk me through the certification process for being an equine therapy place? Who is doing this certification, is there certification and could anyone, basically, with a horse in their background say that they’re offering equine therapy?

SUSAN REGAN: That’s an excellent question. I was actually hoping you would ask the question, I was hoping that would come up. This often comes up because when it comes to the mental psychiatric situation, the typical number of letters after one’s name, what certification you have passed, etc., etc., it is what seems to be the mandate, but we’ve seen a lot of people with all of these initials after their names, I don’t see them solving this problem, quite frankly. This problem is growing.

I have taught probably over the past 20 years hundreds of people to ride. I have trained many breeds of horses. I play polo with the men. I have fox hunted, I’ve earned my colors, I’ve coached, I have shown, I have done cross country. I feel very validated in my experience. We had a large
commercial barn for ten years. I never had any issues on the barn. I coached many people, we sold many horses. I feel that experience along, in itself, gives me the good judgment. We are not dealing with psychotherapy. We are dealing with teaching a person a skill and I think that’s where you need to divide the two things. There is a person who interprets the results, perhaps. We are the teachers of a skill. That is what makes it different. They are learning how to work with the horse. They are learning how to handle the horse. They are learning how to interpret the horse, so I do not have a certificate, I would never claim to have it. I can tell you I’m very good with people and horses and having them actually reach this feeling of a better quality of life. I hope that answers your question.

REP. WOOD (29TH): Yeah, having been a horse owner most of my life, I get head straightened out every day, every time I go out in the back yard. I just have a concern with saying that you’re offering a, you know, teaching someone a skill you having this fall under medical. I think this is a great idea and just needs to be further explored so that we prevent abuse in something like this should this pass and, you know, anyone kind of saying we’re offering veterans therapy now and insurance has to cover, so I think it needs to be tweaked a little bit more and I’m happy to further discuss that.

SUSAN REGAN: And that would I recommend is, we have a very specific curriculum. I would not want -- I would probably like to have this program of ours registered or trademarked, if you will. We have a very specific program, how we handle it, and I think much like the military. I think you can tell from
my demeanor, I am a very organized, very disciplined person. This is not a fly-by-night type of thing, so anyone who wanted to fall under this, I think they should pass our credentials, not us passing someone else’s credentials. There should be a Foxfield F.A.R.M. program. If it doesn’t come under that curriculum, then it would not be paid.

REP. WOOD (29TH): Thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Representative Rose.

REP. ROSE (118TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning.

SUSAN REGAN: Good morning.

REP. ROSE (118TH): Approximately how many veterans have come through your program?

SUSAN REGAN: Fifteen.

REP. ROSE (118TH): Fifteen. Did you -- Have you done any -- Do you do an intake when they come in, like some kind of a mental health assessment when they come in, as well as an assessment --

SUSAN REGAN: Another very good question. Essentially speaking, we find that they will come through a reference of a person, a family member, or something. What we ask for and we certainly don’t want to be too invasive in anything, but we do ask them to be able to call their doctor to find out -- or whoever is treating them, to find out what the status of their situation is, what they’re taking, medications and so forth, to make sure -- ascertain they would actually be an appropriate candidate for working with them and then we continue to -- and then we can monitor with the doctor afterwards as to what -- Now this is all under HIPAA, we don’t share
it with anybody, but in fact, that’s where we take it from that first step, so yes we do, we have them come in, we sit down, we talk about the program. There is a registration fee, which I suggest they pay for, it’s a $25 dollar registration fee. They fill out their forms, give us all the information. I suggest they do it because that makes them committed to coming rather than the insurance company. Does that answer your question?

REP. ROSE (118TH): That answers the first part, thank you. The second part is do you do an exit interview?

SUSAN REGAN: Yes.

REP. ROSE (118TH): And what are the results there?

SUSAN REGAN: Another good -- We give them an open book test at the end of the period because we give them many sheets of paper, instructions, and illustrations and so forth. Once they take that test, then obviously they all do well on it, they more or less do quite well on it, and then we give them a survey and I’d like to read, actually, if I may take a moment to read a couple of the surveys I brought along of the ones that have agreed for me to do that, asked them professionalism and directives and clarity of instructions one to five, they gave us a five. They gave us a five on all of these; cleanliness and suitability of the facilities for the curriculum --

REP. ROSE (118TH): If I could interrupt you for a moment, I’m sorry. I’m more concerned with their mental wellbeing when they’ve left. What are the differences that you -- do you test -- let’s look at that.
SUSAN REGAN: Certainly, let me give you an example. We have had those have had after three weeks where they have not pursued getting a job. Depression has set in to such a point that they cannot deal with their own families. They are in anxiety and stress. One of the gentlemen came up to me and said after three weeks, Susan, I have a job. I said that’s fantastic. Two weeks later, he came up, gave me a hug in the middle of the barn, and he said Susan, I just bought a car. I said that’s terrific. These are the types -- so when we talk about the traditional brain scans and things that would normally be perhaps part of whatever psychiatric reviews, these are the successes that we see. We see the success in their demeanor, in their confidence, and the actual activity in their lives. They have had better relationships with their families. Does that answer your question?

REP. ROSE (118TH): It does, thank you, and being the mother of a soldier who has PTSD, I’m very well aware of all of the various nuances that go along with that. I just think one of my concerns is I don’t know that there’s any medical studies done on this type of therapy, has there been actual studies where we can see --

SUSAN REGAN: There are studies and I did send along information that I think prior to all of this a couple of weeks ago, in which case there are many studies going on everywhere, but all the studies prove that these are all good things. I haven’t seen a study that actually says anything to do with equine therapy is a bad thing. I think the opportunity to flourish is what comes through you folks. You folks need to give it that sense of it will be a success because you, yourself, personally
have a son who has PTSD. It comes from personal experience as to what happens and I can’t see the downside on this. I can’t see not giving the opportunity for this to flourish. What’s the worse thing that can happen? It doesn’t help?

REP. ROSE (118TH): Thank you. I agree with Representative Wood’s statements as far as continuing support of this. I mean, there’s a lot of therapies, there’s floating therapy, there’s all types of different therapies out there and, you know, I think I’d need some more information on exactly how much, how better, how much better are these veterans when they leave? Can they get off medications, so I think we need to do a little more studies.

SUSAN REGAN: Anything better is better.

REP. ROSE (118TH): Well, yeah. Thank you.

SUSAN REGAN: Thank you.

SEN. MARONEY (14TH): Thank you, Representative Rose. Senator Leone.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the time and good morning to you.

SUSAN REGAN: Good morning.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): I’m listening to the testimony and it’s very interesting and I know that there are benefits for going through this type of a program. Maybe two very quick questions, have you reached out or are you working with the federal VA or the Connecticut VA or our internal veterans’ affairs to see, you know, if there’s synergy there and if there’s any common ground because I would think if this is going to be about helping veterans, that’s
where the veterans are and where they should be coming from if they need therapy.

SUSAN REGAN: The short answer to it is yes, we have. We’ve participated in stand down day for two years. I think we’ve reached out to every veterans organization --

SEN. LEONE (27TH): But you don’t have a formal relationship with either one of the two organizations other than --

SUSAN REGAN: With the veterans -- with Commissioner Saadi, we do, we have spoken to him about it and he’s very supportive of it. He believes the program -- I mean, he believes the benefits are there for it, so yes, we have, but we don’t have a formal relationship. Have we reached out, have we spoken, have we communicated, yes, we have.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Okay. And then the other question, as this is about insurance coverage and I understand you’re doing an intake, do you have mental health professionals on staff to monitor --

SUSAN REGAN: No.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): -- the ongoing case management that would justify the cost?

SUSAN REGAN: No. The answer to that is no, we do not have anybody specifically identified to it, however, we would be open to anybody who wants to monitor it. I don’t have any problem. We’re an open book here.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Okay. Thank you for those answers. I would just say it’s a good topic. I think we need to do a little bit more work to get it to where insurance could or want to cover this, so --
- but I appreciate the efforts. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. BORER (115TH): We switched.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Madam Chairman, sorry about that. You’re welcome. Senator Abrams, I believe, was next.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): Good morning. Thank you so much for being here. I was very impressed with your testimony. You’re obviously passionate.

SUSAN REGAN: I am.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): About helping our veterans and I appreciate that. As I’m reading this statement of purpose in the proposed bill, it seems to be broader than just your program. Am I reading that correctly? It’s more of a general equine therapy, acknowledging that and having insurance pay for it?

SUSAN REGAN: I’m not quite sure I understand your question. What do you mean by broader?

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): Well, it could be other organizations other than just yours. Correct?

SUSAN REGAN: It certainly could be. I think what I am saying specifically is that our program, because it is focused on veterans and we have included first responders as well, that’s our latest mission, as I stated earlier, would want to see this trademarked or have some sort of registration for this program because very specifically, our program works. We see the benefits of it. It’s almost palpable the benefits of this program. My husband and I have put many hours and much money into this program because we believe in it and because we will need -- whether you pass this bill or not, we will have to go
funding and if it becomes because we can’t get the grant or we can’t get the donation, we will have to go on funding it for as long as we want to do it, therefore I think if we have that much belief in it, your serious consideration should be there. We are not looking to make any money. My husband and I are not taking administrative expenses. We are looking to merely pay the nurses.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): I don’t believe that you are.

SUSAN REGAN: The broader spectrum, I’m talking about us at the moment our test of what this curriculum should be.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): And I think that -- I want you to know that I seriously consider everything that you’re saying here. My hesitation is only in opening up the door to anyone who might say they’re doing the same thing that might not have your experience or your expertise or your passion and so I think that’s where the hesitation comes in. You’ve certainly testified very convincingly --

SUSAN REGAN: Oh good, well, thank you.

SEN. ABRAMS (13TH): -- and I very much appreciate the work that you’ve been doing, so thank you.

SUSAN REGAN: Okay, thank you, Senator, very much.

REP. BORER (115TH): Anyone else have any comments. I want to thank you for coming and for all your passion on this program. It sounds very beneficial. I echo the comments of Senator Abrams around opening the door up. You asked what is the worst that can happen, I think the worst that can happen is we cover this through insurance and organizations that are not qualified, that are looking to make money,
invite our veterans there and they don’t handle the situation properly, so that would my hesitation.

SUSAN REGAN: I think it would be up to you to ask for accreditation from them. I think that if you said we’re doing it with Foxfield F.A.R.M. and that if you felt that they would have to meet certain credentials, I could certainly give you the basis for the credentials of what they should be doing, how they should be doing it, what the standard should be, if they don’t meet it, then they don’t get the insurance coverage. It’s a fairly simple thing, you screen them and you vet them.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well, thank you very much and I think there’s an opportunity to work with the commissioner to also see what types of grants are available so that you can continue --

SUSAN REGAN: That’s a positive thought. I appreciate that.

REP. BORER (115TH): -- carrying on this important program.

SUSAN REGAN: Thank you for your time. You’ve been very generous and I really appreciate all the questions because the more questions you ask me, the happier I get.


SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Good morning, Representative Borer, Representative Vail, Chairman-in-Absentee, member of the committee, thank you for the opportunity this morning to testify very briefly in support of Senate Resolution 3, IN SUPPORT OF
RECOGNIZING WOMEN IN THE CADET NURSING CORPS DURING WORLD WAR II AS VETERANS and Senate Bill 801, AN ACT EXPANDING CERTAIN VETERANS ACCESS TO PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, which is why Senator Kelly and I are here. The bill seeks to clarify that the federal aid and attendance benefits that disabled and elderly veterans receive should not count against the veterans’ income eligibility for certain state Medicaid programs. These benefits are used to reimburse elderly and disabled veterans for home care and day-to-day tasks that they may struggle with living out on their own and it assists in aging in place, which we are learning is the most affordable way to age with dignity in the comfort of one’s home. So I’m going to let Senator Kelly talk to the details on that, but briefly on the resolution regarding the cadet women’s services, we would not be here today celebrating Valentine’s Day with our families, testifying in front of this great committee, without the men and women who have served this country so well for so long, including those that are in uniform today and the women of the cadet nurses program deserve equal recognition and I’m proud to stand in support of that, but I’d like to turn it over to Senator Kelly for comments on the aid and attendance bill.

SEN. KELLY (21ST): Thank you, Senator. I couldn’t agree more with Senator Formica just indicated, that many of the liberties, freedoms, and values that we have and enjoy are really the product of our veterans and we are very fortunate to not only have those blessings of liberty, but to have the blessings of sacrifice of the men and women of uniform that serve our country. I’m here to testify about Senate Bill 801 and you have our written
testimony. This is a benefit that veterans are entitled to; it’s aid and attendance. It helps people age in place and when we look at long-term care dollars, right now we spend well over 10 percent of the state budget in aid to nursing homes alone. Nursing homes cost as much as three times that on average of what it costs to be in the community. Aid and attendance is a part of bigger guilt, I’m going to say, that people can wrap around themselves to help them and enable them to age in place.

So this has two-fold benefit. First and foremost, it helps the senior or the veteran in this case age where they want, because people want to stay home where it’s safer, more cost effective, and what they want. The second is that it actually helps the state’s fiscal position, like we’re going to spend three times almost, between $10,000 and $12,000 dollars a month in nursing home care versus $3,000 $4,000 dollars in the community, this is a way to keep people at home. So to me, it makes sense from both a human healthcare perspective, but also from a financial aspect. What is really perplexing here is that in 2012, the General Assembly exempted aid and attendance as an income that would be counted for Medicaid eligibility, but subsequent to that, the Department of Social Services has now started to count a piece of that and I think we need to revisit this to make sure that the department understands that whether it’s just a direct income or as a reimbursement, this income should be and must be exempt so that we can another layer of benefit to the veterans who have been so good to us to enable them to age where they want, which helps them and helps the taxpayers of the state. Thank you.
REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Are there any questions? Yes, Senator.

SEN. OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much. I appreciate you both being here in particular for the nurse cadet corps and I’m very interested, Senator Kelly, in your testimony. I’d like to talk to offline a little bit more so that I make sure I’m understanding it. Actually, I met with some female veterans today. We’re trying to encourage female veterans to actually become aware of the benefits that are out there and a lot of females veterans do not recognize that they are actually able to get some of these benefits. They believe that most of them are for our comrades in arms, the male veterans and I think that it would be nice if we could get our female veterans to come out and wear an army pin right now and I can’t tell you the number of times I’ve been asked oh, who are you wearing that pin for? Well, I’m actually wearing it for me, I actually served, and so I think we’re trying to do that, but I think accessing those benefits is extremely important. I have had many constituents come and say hey, listen, I’m now not eligible for X because they’re counting this into -- this benefit into all my income.

In regards to the nurse cadet corps, I think that’s -- this would be the last group of veterans that have not been recognized since World War II, the female veterans that I believe the nurse cadet corps and Senator Formica, you and I have talked about this many times. I’ve gone to many events for the nurse cadet corps, who wore uniform, who served both in country and overseas, who helped us out when we were drastically short of nurses during World War II to cover that benefit and there have been many
stories written about nurses during the Vietnam War and what the impact was. They just wanted to have recognition and I think it’s extremely important that we give recognition to these women who served as nurses during a conflict that we recognized as the greatest generation, so I didn’t know if you wanted to talk a little bit more about the nurse cadet corps and what they did for us.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Senator, and thank you for your leadership on this issue. I’m not sure that I could put it more eloquently than you have. The fact is, this is an unrecognized group of veterans, true veterans, that have supported the cause of freedom for this country and a simple act of recognition I think is long overdue and you and I, as you point out, have attended numerous events in support of these fine women and, you know, we both support this, so I’m in agreement of that and I hope the committee considers that simple act.

SEN. OSTEN (19TH): Well, this will be four years that we’ve had this bill -- that this bill has been in front of this committee. It’s a simple resolution to encourage our federal colleagues to support this on a federal level, which ultimately is where this has to be, but a component of this also calls for a nurse cadet corps day here in Connecticut, so even if we can’t convince our federal colleagues, here in Connecticut we would be giving them the honor or recognizing them as what Connecticut perceives as veterans, so is there anything else that you would want to say about having that day here in Connecticut?

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Well, we have days honoring quite a few different groups of folks and certainly
this is a group that would deserve -- be deserving of a day, so you do a pretty good job of representing the issue, so thank you for that.

SEN. Osten (19TH): I’m just trying to frame it because I just think it’s extremely important and women veterans have not historically taken advantage of the services that are out there for veterans. They often just step back into the communities and don’t take advantage of the tax abatements that are out there, the medical services that are out there, just the communities groups and again, there’s a group that is working in Easter Seals, the state gave them a grant to help out with bonding for a rally, a veterans’ rally point, and they’re looking to bring more female veterans in there, it’s in Norwich, but they’re also working in some of the other Easter Seal locations and I think it’s important for us to have these, what would essentially be wraparound services and could take advantage of Senator Kelly’s bill that he put through.

We’re actually talking about that bill today to say how important it is for us to make sure that we’re giving the full benefit to veterans who have actually given us a reason to be here today speaking, so I want to thank you both for working on the pieces of legislation that are. I know that you’re co-sponsors of other veterans’ legislation and I really want to thank you for that. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Senator.

REP. BORER (115TH): Do we have any other questions or comments? I want to thank you both for coming and as far as SJ No. 3, I know there’s been a long
history, so hopefully this is the year that we move this forward. On Senate Bill 801, I have heard about this in my district from the veterans that come to talk to me about their assistance. It’s unfortunate that when we evaluate a bill and we do the fiscal note, we don’t do a cross benefit analysis. We just show the cost. We never show what the long-term value is or, you know, what the opportunity is for decreasing costs. You started talking about the history and I got a little fuzzy there, so in 2012 we -- the general statute passes and then it was reversed by statute or --

SEN. KELLY (21ST): In 2013, we passed a bill that exempted aid and attendance income from being counted towards Medicaid public assistance benefits. Subsequent to that, DSS through, I’m going to say regulation of its own, has interpreted that differently than what this general assembly declared in the 2012 law, so what I believe -- I don’t believe the SS can do what they’re doing, but they are and so I think we need to clarify that and make sure that all income, aid and attendance income, and reimbursements for aid and attendance are all exempt from being counted towards, you know, Connecticut DSS Medicaid. One way to look at this is this is a way, and we hear a lot of this now, particularly with our budget issues, is how can we get more money out of Washington. Here’s a way and we’ve done it and so I think we’ve got to get back to the basics, aid and attendance in any form should be and must be exempt.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. So while we continue to move this bill forward, I’m going to ask if we get a legal opinion on whether DSS is in the position to make those regulation changes because if not, then I
don’t know if we need to do another statute, right, we could just revert back to the 2012 statute that originally had this intent?

SEN. KELLY (21ST): Sure.

REP. BORER (115TH): Does that make sense?

SEN. KELLY (21ST): And it makes sense and they also Senator Osten’s offer to sit down and work through this. I do appreciate that offer and I will take you up on that.

SEN. OSTEN (19TH): Good.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, gentlemen, for coming. Okay, our next speaker is Representative Zawistowski, Senator Kissel, and Grace Dowling.

SEN. KISSEL (7TH): Good afternoon, again, Chairman Maroney, Chairman Borer, and Ranking Members Logan and Vail. I’m here with Grace Dowling. We are in support of Grace’s great idea, Senate Bill 778, and since I was here for a long time two minutes ago, I’m going to turn it right over to Representative Zawistowski.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you, Senator Kissel. I wanted to thank the committee for raising this bill. I’m Tami Zawistowski, 61st District, representing Suffield, East Granby, and a portion of Windsor. I have with me Ms. Dowling who has spent a considerable amount of time working on this bill having to do with green alerts for veterans and I’d like to hand it over to her since she’s done all the work. Thank you.

GRACE DOWLING: Hello. My name is Grace Dowling and I’m a high school junior from Suffield. I’d like to thank the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs, especially
Senator Maroney, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GREEN ALERT SYSTEM FOR MISSING VETERANS. I’m an active member of the American Legion, our axillary post 36 in Windsor Locks. I serve as the axillary sergeant in arms. Both of my grandfathers were veterans. I have family friends, relatives who are veterans. I work with veterans through volunteer opportunities within the American Legion and VFW. I brought the idea of the Green Alert to Senator Kissel and Representative Zawistowski last legislative session. Unfortunately, the idea I brought too late.

As part of my civics course last spring, we were given an assignment that required us to undertake a project that would make a change in society and I thought this would be a very good idea. I read about the mother of a veteran in Wisconsin who was successful in having a Green Alert bill passed after her son, an at-risk vet, committed suicide. When she realized he was missing, she knew he was in danger. She contacted the police and filed a missing person report. He was not considered critical missing for eight days. Eighteen days later, his body was found. He had taken his life. Had there been an immediate response, the outcome may have been different and she came up with the idea of the green alert, an alert system for at-risk veteran. A veteran is considered at-risk when he or she has a physical or mental health condition that is service related.

At-risk veterans in Connecticut deserve to know that we care about them. They are as valuable as our children and our elderly. We have men and women who have been willing to sacrifice their personal comforts to protect our constitution and our freedom. Because of them, I can speak freely and
enjoy the blessings of liberty. Because of their service, many have suffered physical and mental wounds. We know that the suicide rate for veterans is high. If a soldier is missing on the field, his or her unit will send out a search and rescue party. Why can’t we do the same for the same at-risk in Connecticut? The veterans in our state deserve the same level of concern that we have provided to our children and our elderly. As a civilian and child, I can’t imagine what combat veterans have seen and must live with as of all of their time in the service, we don’t know what someone is struggling with inside. We do know that when an at-risk veteran goes missing, there’s probably that it will end in self-harm or death.

This legislation is a Nine Line. The term Nine Line is a medivac request for an injured soldier on the battlefield. The term symbolizes hope and trust in the service members’ countrymen. We should provide them hope to them that they are part of our community. This is a small step to show our veterans that we do have their 6. A Green Alert will go a long way in making a difference in the lives of not only at-risk veterans, but the friends and family and the community of those veterans. Please let our veterans know what we’ve got their 6. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this proposed bill.


GRACE DOWLING: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): We don’t get high school students up here often so obviously you’re very active and very passionate and I really applaud you for being courageous enough to come and speak before
all of us scary people. Do any of my colleagues have a question? Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Good morning.

GRACE DOWLING: Good morning.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Happy Valentine’s.

GRACE DOWLING: Happy Valentine’s to you, too.

REP. VAIL (52ND): To reiterate her words, you did a great job.

GRACE DOWLING: Thank you.

REP. VAIL (52ND): You know, it’s nice to see your passion on the issue, as well. So a green alert, would that kind of work like an Amber Alert, it’s the same concept except this would be specific to veterans?

GRACE DOWLING: Yes, because, I don’t know if this is right or not, but I know when you file a missing person, you have to wait 24 hours, so it would be like an Amber Alert.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. And they did pass this in Michigan?

GRACE DOWLING: Wisconsin.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Wisconsin, okay, very good and that’s where -- and again, that’s where you got the idea for it?

GRACE DOWLING: Yeah.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And you think it should be modeled after their law. Okay. I think this is a
great idea and I want to thank you for coming up and you did a great job.

GRACE DOWLING: Thank you.

REP. VAIL (52ND): You’re welcome.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, Representative Vail. Does anybody else have any questions or comments? I just had a question on -- so the purpose of the Green Alert is to let the public know, right, that a veteran is at-risk. Is it also to allow veterans in the area to kind of mobilize and pull together because they may sometimes have a connection?

GRACE DOWLING: It’s almost like if they realize, it’s almost like somebody cares. If they hear that they’re missing, it might be a time of oh, somebody does really love me, somebody does care. I can come home and I’m okay.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, great. I think those are all the questions I have. I want to thank you for coming up and thank you for your time and thank you to your representative and your senator for bringing you forward.

REP. ZAWISTOWSKI (61ST): Thank you very much.

REP. BORER (115TH): At this point, we’ve reached the first hour where we allow our representatives and our public officials to speak, so I’m going to switch quickly to the general public listing. We only have one member, so we’ll move back to the elected officials and that’s Stan Thurston.

STAN THURSTON: When we made the choice to enlist, we accepted our responsibilities; we take an oath that most of us don’t really comprehend at that time that we may never return home. Despite that, we
served as we are directed. We serve in a geographical area that we’re assigned and we perform our duties and we do that 24/7. All those that have served this nation honorably have served that purpose. They have defended this country and have done it with honor, dignity, and respect to this nation. So in that context, I support several initiatives that are being considered by this committee. First of all, I don’t feel that I am qualified to speak on the mechanics, but certainly the Bill 801 that’s providing expanded veterans’ access to public assistance programs was covered earlier and I think speaks to the advantage of having veterans being able to access the programs.

Bill No 5563 should provide the knowledge to judges relative to mental health and posttraumatic stress so they can make better decisions on veterans that are in the court system in how to provide the right judgment in their cases. But not only is it important to recognize the issues that returning service members have from deployment, but also to support the programs and services that can provide a path back to the community. Restating an old saying, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure and we’ve talked about a number of different programs that are being considered to help veterans. I was thinking while they were speaking that I think what we need to provide is a path for veterans to return to their communities with a sense of purpose and connection. One thing that has disturbed me is the suicide rate amongst veterans and this -- in these recent years as compared to previous conflicts that we’ve had. If you look back World War II, Korea, Vietnam, they were nowhere near, so what is happening in society, so again addressing programs
and ways to -- that can cut these numbers and provide veterans with a reconnection with their communities is important in my mind.

Also the bill to provide dependent children and family members the opportunity to pick up and use the educational system and receive the waivers that their parents or their loved ones have earned is an important initiative, again recognizing that their service is something that we value. The 6977 addresses a very important issue for veterans’ organizations. Veterans’ organizations are funded by their members and through the efforts in fundraising and events and also through contributions from the community, all of these monies are returned to our communities to help veterans, their families that are in need, as well as provide scholarships for students that are looking to further their education. Well, remember, we were all volunteers and have contributed both our time and our expenses for travel that we incur in supporting all these events. None of us get paid or very few, actually.

If you look at the veterans’ organizations, it is strictly volunteer with very few exceptions for full-time staff for some of the bigger organizations, so all the VA -- the veteran service organizations and also the military service organizations that are incorporated in Connecticut have to pay a $50 dollar annual incorporation filing fee. For many VSOs and MSOs, this can be a significant portion of the cash flow for the year -- the impact and the ability to help veterans -- and impact their ability to help the veterans of Connecticut, so we recommend the support of Bill 6977.
As a side note, I’d like to -- unlike businesses, the VSOs and MSOs are chartered, some of us a hundred years ago, and every year we change officers. The incorporation refiling system is geared more for businesses and corporations and it would be helpful for the Secretary of State to look at this and, you know, try to provide a better way of dealing with it. The main thing is that in changing officers, sometimes the information does not always get passed onto the ones that are taking -- again, we’re volunteers. We come in, we take these tasks on, and we are not experts. Very few of us have lawyer backgrounds and we’re just citizens trying to understand the system and work within it. So again, I think this is something they should look at when they consider veterans’ organizations or any volunteer organization that has to file for incorporation or other state recognition.

REP. BORER (115TH): Mr. Thurston, I’m going to -- unfortunately have to apply the time. We allow three minutes and I’ve allowed you ten just to give you more leeway, but we’ll have to -- you can summarize, please.

STAN THURSTON: Okay, thank you very much and I would like to thank the committee for the time they have given me and if you have any questions, I’d be more than happy to answer.

REP. BORER (115TH): Does anybody have any questions. If I had to ask you which bill on this list is your top priority, I know it’s hard to pick one, but they’re all -- you know, they’re all beneficial, but I’ve heard a lot of feedback about expanding the benefits. What would you think is most impactful?
STAN THURSTON: The -- Like I say, the -- we talked about veterans -- the suicide rate amongst veterans. I’ve talked to people that are professionally in the social area and other people that deal with this and we have thoughts on this, but I don’t think anybody has had a real answer. As I mentioned earlier, I think allowing veterans to reconnect with their community is an important factor and maybe that is the common thing, how we bring that about is a very good question and I don’t think there’s a single answer for it. I know people that have used the ACORN method and had good results. A gentleman that I’m good friends with had PTSD and that was his way of, you know, overcoming and dealing with his issues. Also have programs, Take a Vet Fishing, Take a Vet Golfing that we support and the -- I think the key connection there is that they get to meet with other veterans and get into activities that they all enjoy, but also to be able to talk to each other.

Veterans don’t always talk to the general public primarily because there isn’t that understanding of the issues and the things that we’ve experienced and to the average veteran, it’s probably very difficult to try to explain to somebody, you know, what you’ve been through and especially if you’re in the frontline of combat. So talking to other veterans I think was probably an unrecognized key with World War II. We had, you know, 16 million returning home. You couldn’t go down a street in the United States without passing a veteran’s home. They came home together, they knew each other. They had grown up, gone to school, enlisted, you know, and probably served in different aspects of the military, but
when they came home, they had that connection. That’s something that’s been lost in recent times.

REP. BORER (115TH): So connecting them not only the community, but to each other --

STAN THURSTON: Yes.

REP. BORER (115TH): -- through programs and I know that we had the opportunity, myself, Representative Vail and Senator Maroney, to come to the Veterans’ Affairs Division in Rocky Hill and we were alarmed by the information we received around the suicide rate, so we have a lot of good programs, but we need to do more, so thank you for your input.

STAN THURSTON: Okay. Thank you very much.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, thank you. okay. Our next speaker is Matt Stillman.

MATT STILLMAN: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and members of the committee for having -- letting me speak today and present in support of Senate Bill 801. I have already submitted written testimony. I am not going to re-read it because frankly I don’t think you need to hear me read what I wrote which you probably were presented. I’ll try to summarize it briefly and I’d also like to acknowledge and thank Senators Kelly and Formica for speaking in support of the bill as well. Senator Kelly, I’m an elder law attorney which is a field of practice that specifically addresses issues regarding seniors, disabled individuals, and veterans as really part of the practice. Myself, I am the past president of the elder law section -- I’m sorry, past president of the elder law organization called NAELA, the Connecticut chapter. I’m on the executive committee
of the elder law section of the state Bar and I’m well versed on this subject.

The bill is in support of exempting reimbursement of medical expenses that the VA gives to our veterans from any state Medicaid assistance, particular to age in place. This doesn’t address institutional care, it only addresses home care programs. Institutional care has separate benefit which is not affected by this bill. Basically, Connecticut seniors, when you’re qualifying for Medicaid, as you do with veterans’ benefits, have income and asset tests, okay, that you can’t have too much money or you can’t have too much income or you don’t qualify. Connecticut veterans are having their income counted twice because they first make their income any particular source, Social Security, pension, whatever, and if you qualify based on needs and means test for the VA that you have medical expenses that you are getting reimbursed for, the state department of social services counts it again, counts about 75 percent of it again, so you’re getting hit twice. This bill aims to exempt that.

You must apply. If you apply for Medicaid benefits in the state of Connecticut, you must apply for veterans’ benefits for the benefit as a veteran or a surviving spouse, you are required to. What has happened in certain circumstances, and Senator Formica’s constituent was one of these, is he applied for the benefits and then got turned down for Medicaid because his income through the medical reimbursement now made him ineligible for state assistance, which that was -- he had to prove to the VA that it was pure medical reimbursement and that the money went to medical expenses; it’s not for rent, it’s not for gas, food, heat, taxes, it’s
purely for medical expenses. Medical expenses require the individual to be able to stay in the community. The specific definition is that they require the aid and attendance of another person daily to perform personal functions in their activities of daily living. That’s a very simplified definition.

So it’s not for someone, by the way, who oh, can you help me, you know, cut the grass today, can you -- or someone in an independent community where oh, you’re watching me to make sure I don’t leave. These are people who have specific medical needs for assistance who need people to assist them in getting up out of bed, bathing, showering, actually eating, not even preparing meals, a series of requirements. DSS’ incorrect calculation has caused these veterans, one of Mr. Formica’s constituents, to be disqualified and we -- the elder law attorney in question was able to prevent that eventually, but that individual in particular had a daughter who was a nurse for 20 years, was very well represented and known here on the Capitol as he had worked with legislature over 20 years, is on the Connecticut Wall of Veterans, and had a capable elder law attorney represent him. What happens to the veterans who don’t have such experience of such breadth of knowledge or history with legislature? That’s the problem here and that’s the main problem we seek to address with this bill.

Last but not least, I will also point out, Madam Chairman, you indicated that to have a legal opinion, under federal law, both federal code and federal regulations, income for reimbursement for medical expenses is not allowed to be counted for any kind of state-supported assistance, including
Medicaid or other federal benefits, and our DSS in counting 75 percent of this reimbursement of medical expenses is respectfully in direct violation of these regulations. I’ll answer any questions you may have regarding this.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Thank you, that’s good information. I do have a question on the we’ll call the assistance, not income, is that paid directly to those providing the services or is that paid to the veteran to then pay those providing services?

MATT STILLMAN: I’m sorry, Madam Chairman, can you repeat the question, please?

REP. BORER (115TH): The benefit, the benefit to the veterans, yeah, is that paid directly to the veteran or is that --

MATT STILLMAN: It’s paid to the veteran.

REP. BORER (115TH): It’s paid to the veteran to pay those providing the assistance?

MATT STILLMAN: Yes, Ma’am. If I may clarify, what happens is when one applies for these benefits, you have to go through an application process and you have to detail, quite minutely, for your medical expenses up to the prior year when you applied and when you illustrate what your medical expenses are, the VA evaluates that and gives you up to a certain level which is somewhat, not nominal, but, you know, it’s not a ton of money, doesn’t give you the full reimbursement, just gives you up to a certain level. What they do is then once you get approved, they deposit this money into your checking account or bank account automatically by electronic deposit, so that’s how the veterans receive these funds.
REP. BORER (115TH): Is there a concern that a veteran, and I’m not saying this happens, I’m just -- because I’m supportive of this bill, is there a concern that the veteran is not spending the money on what it’s intended for?

MATT STILLMAN: I don’t believe that is a concern. I think -- I don’t believe that’s a concern. I don’t know what the concerns are. I was familiar with Commissioner Bremby’s testimony in promoting the bill back in 2012 or 2013, I apologize, I don’t remember the number -- the year, but specifically when DSS promoted this legislation and they were in support of it, they -- in their testimony, they explained they exempted a full benefit. There was no qualification or clarification that the benefit would be attached. Only subsequently by some administrative policy did they seem to modify that and that has been the focus of our concern now for some time.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, so I’m just thinking, those who are non-veterans who get assistance at home, they go through an agency and the agency gets directly through -- let’s say somebody is on Title 19, right, and they need assistance, they need a homemaker, they need a bather?

MATT STILLMAN: And the state pays these caregivers, I think is what you’re referring to.

REP. BORER (115TH): They pay these caregivers, they pay them directly and then they go through the agency. It’s cumbersome, but that’s the way it works.

MATT STILLMAN: That’s correct and those expenses are not calculated in this application for
reimbursement. These must be medical expenses that the individual pays and it comes out of pocket. This is not covered state paid expenses or reimbursed expenses from other source. It must be un-reimbursed medical expenses.

REP. BORER (115TH): Right and I understand that. I’m just wondering if the difference is in the process.

MATT STILLMAN: I couldn’t advise what that difference is about, but respectfully, we don’t -- respectively my organization, our clients, don’t understand. I respectively receive phone calls from veterans, from representatives, from people who work for the federal VA, even from people who work from the state veterans’ department, you know, asking me what can you do, how can we help this, and we explain the problem to them and we are trying to address it.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, so we have to resolve it. We’ve just got to figure out how?

MATT STILLMAN: Yes, Ma’am.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, anybody else? All right, thank you.

MATT STILLMAN: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Representative, are you up for public speaking or do you want to speak to your -- the bills of interest when we debate them?

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): I was just going to speak quickly on Bill 7062 with a member from my district if that’s okay, Madam Chair.

REP. BORER (115TH): Oh, yes, sure.
REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay, thank you. Good morning. My name is Ron Napoli. I am a state representative in the 73rd District. Honorable Co-Chair, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, Honorable Vice-Chair Senator Abrams, Representative Boyd, Ranking Members Senator Logan, Representative Vail, and all the members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, thank you very much for raising this bill, 7062. I’m here with a member from my district in Waterbury, Joseph Nolan, who is a member of the Veterans Memorial Committee who has done great work on these issues and at this moment, I will yield my time to Mr. Nolan.

JOSEPH NOLAN: Thank you very much. Good morning. This is concerning House Bill 7062, AN ACT CONCERNING TUITION WAIVERS AT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OF VETERANS AND GOLD STAR FAMILY MEMBERS. My name is Joseph P. Nolan. I’m from Waterbury, Connecticut. I’m a Gold Star father and a Vietnam veteran. As a father -- As the father of Joseph M. Nolan, U.S. Army, who was killed in Iraq in November 2004 and as a Vietnam combat veteran, I know full well the horror of war. With the death of my son, Joe, our goal has become to keep his memory alive and to help others who may be need.

I have proposed bills similar to House Bill 7062, both this year and last year and actually in previous years with the help of Representative -- former Representative Jeff Berger. Last year at another hearing before this committee, I mentioned that in Massachusetts, Gold Star parents each receive a $2,000 dollar annuity every year. In the state of New York, Gold Star parents each receive a $500 dollar sum yearly. That’s for life. While
Connecticut does not have that program for Gold Star parents, tuition waivers would be a good way for the state to honor the fallen and their parents or spouses and veterans’ children.

This bill proposal is unusual in that it is not simply a hand-out, rather it is a ticket for those Gold Star families to choose to go to college. For some, it can be a way to get back into society or for others to become a more productive member of society. For some, it could mark the start of a new career and for others, a chance to pursue avocational pursuits. Another way of looking at it, perhaps this bill could be a way to raise declining enrollments in Connecticut public colleges.

I read recently that a federal bill has been proposed to allow Pell college grants for prison inmates to take community college courses in Connecticut. I feel that Gold Star families and veterans’ families are more deserving and that House Bill 7062 should be passed by the legislature. Thank you to Representative Napoli and the Veterans' Affairs Committee for allowing me to speak today.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for coming forward and first of all, thank you for your service.

JOSEPH NOLAN: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): And secondly, on behalf of the committee, myself, and Representative Vail, I’m very sorry for your loss.

JOSEPH NOLAN: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): And this is an important piece of legislation and I believe we have seen it before. Hopefully we can get some version of this through.
What are the other benefits that you hadn’t mentioned -- I don’t see any requirement for a certain amount of time to have been a resident in order to qualify for this benefit. Correct?

JOSEPH NOLAN: Right.

REP. BORER (115TH): So it can also bring people into our state, right? It can welcome families of Gold Star members to come into our state and utilize this benefit --

JOSEPH NOLAN: That’s correct.

REP. BORER (115TH): -- as another intention.

JOSEPH NOLAN: I will say that I’m a retired teacher from Waterbury, but I’m also a lifelong student and I am a student right now at Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport. As a matter of fact, I graduate on May 23rd with an associate’s degree in fine arts, which by the way, happens to be my birthday, May 23rd, 70 years old, but we won’t talk about that. But the point is, I’m still receiving, although I’ve long exhausted, you know, veterans’ benefits, I still get the tuition waiver at age 69 and again, I’m a lifelong student and a teacher. Initially, you kind of had to get a Master’s degree in -- you know, in Waterbury the more degrees you had above your Bachelor’s, the more money you made. At the time, I was married and I had three young children, so it was advantageous to stay in school and now I just do it because I enjoy it, but the point is, other families, young families, or other families would certainly benefit from this, you know, more so like I said maybe a hand-out, not that some of the other programs you’ve discussed today are important, they’re all important, but I think
this would serve a lot of needs. There is a decline, I understand, in enrollment at different state schools, thus theoretically they may enroll a little bit. I notice last year the assembly allowed New York residents to go to West Connecticut in Danbury, at a reduced rate, again, if that’s the case, I really think we need to concentrate on Connecticut people, you know, but again, that’s just my opinion.

REP. BORER (115TH): Agreed, and I also think, this kind of plays into our prior speakers, Mr. Thurston’s, comments about reconnecting our veterans to our communities. We have a lot of great resources that already exist for tuition for current veterans and we have to communicate those resources a little bit more aggressively so everybody’s aware of what we already do have.

JOSEPH NOLAN: That’s a good point.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yep, and then, of course, I think we need to expand it. Do you have any comment? Okay, all right, well, thank you very much for your time. Thank you. Okay, our next speaker is Representative McCarty, I almost said McCarthy.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Good morning, Chairman Borer and Ranking Member Vail. It’s truly a pleasure to be here today to speak to you in favor of Senate Joint Resolution No. 3, which is a RESOLUTION TO RECOGNIZE WOMEN IN THE CADET NURSE CORPS DURING WORLD WAR II AS VETERANS and I know you heard some testimony earlier about this wonderful group of nurse cadets during World War II, so I’d like to just offer you, if I may, I did submit written testimony, just a very brief overview and just speak to you one-on-one.
These women, there were 180,000 women who really raised their hands, took an oath, during World War II to serve and they went through very intensive training that the reduced to a 30-month training period, so these women were very well trained, they took an oath, they wore a uniform, and they pledged throughout the war, throughout World War II, and by the end of the war near 1945, there were some 80 percent of our U.S. hospitals were being served by these nurse cadets, so without them, I can say, aside from veterans status, we would not have the U.S. healthcare system that we have today. So these women really truly dedicated themselves to service, to helping our wounded servicemen as they returned. Today, they are just looking -- some of these women now are in their mid-90’s, so they’re just looking at this time to be granted veteran status.

In the past, there were bills in front of U.S. Congress that were looking for burial rights and benefits and the status. They are foregoing that. There’s a bill in the U.S. Senate that will look just to give these women the true status that they deserve during their lifetime. I was very fortunate this summer to attend a ceremony in my hometown of Waterford. Eileen DeGaetano, she wanted to be here with everyone today. She’s really spearheading this effort here in Connecticut to educate all of our citizens about these wonderful nurses who served during World War II and so I know with Eileen, she never gives up, we’re going to get this done. I’m just here in really support that we can get this resolution through the General Assembly and put Connecticut’s official voice that we would like to see these women granted status. And a footnote, I can tell you that it took a long time, even for
World War II women who were the air service pilots that ferried the B26 and B29s during World War II, they were not granted their status for some 33 years after the war and only received their medals during the Obama administration recently.

So I think there’s hope. There’s something to be said about tenacity and persistence and really looking when there’s a cause as great as this. These women truly deserve to be recognized for the work they did. They’re true -- In my opinion, they are some unsung heroes and I can tell you, coming from that little ceremony of recognition when we gave state citations to these women in Connecticut, they’re still talking about it and they were just thrilled, so I think it’s -- I feel very, very honored to be part of this and to be able to do all that I possibly can to advocate that they receive veteran status, so I hope this Veterans’ Affairs Committee will support the resolution, move it on, and let’s really get our federal delegation, which I know they are working to make sure that this happens during the lifetime of some of these women, so that, in a nutshell, you have my testimony that’s in a little more detail that can give you more of the facts and statistics relating to these great women. So I can answer any questions you may have.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. My question is, there was 180,000. Do you know how many we have in Connecticut today?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): That’s something we’re trying -- I’m glad you asked me that question because just as early this morning, I was speaking with Eileen and I said I really would hope that we, as legislatures, could maybe get E-blast out to our
constituents and ask them to report to us do they know of any women in their communities that may have served in the cadet corps during World War II, so we don’t actually have data on how many are still currently alive in Connecticut, but I can tell you at this ceremony, there were over a dozen right in our region here, so there are still women that are alive, but as I said, they’re in their mid-90’s and that’s all they’re asking, for that dignity, for that respect, to be recognized as veterans and there are the Veterans of Foreign Affairs Association is backing this, they are very supportive. The American Nurse Association is supportive, so there are a lot of very well-known organizations out there that are behind supporting the women to gain this veteran status. I don’t have the actual number that are remaining, but we’ll try to get that, though, and if we all work together, maybe we can come up with that number and give these women their rightful place in history.

REP. BORER (115TH): And this has come up in previous years and I don’t mean to put you on the spot for the cons, but what were the obstacles to it moving forward in the past?

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): You know, today when I heard that, I don’t -- you know how it goes in the assembly with different bills coming forward. I don’t know whether it was a time constraint or what occurred, I would hope that this year we can get it through. I know Senator Osten is working hard and a number of us in our delegation to really push this. I don’t know how much time these women have and I really think it’s appropriate that we get this status granted to them, do all we can here in Connecticut to put our official voice on that
resolution and encourage our delegation to fight hard.

REP. BORER (115TH): It’s long overdue. Do you have any questions or comments?

REP. VAIL (52ND): There’s no way I can let Representative McCarty speak and not at least make a few comments. No, thank you. Obviously you seem very well versed with this and the information is great and I do think -- I can’t imagine what the opposition would be to this. I don’t see why it hasn’t been done in the past, but I do think because of the age there, I think this is something that needs to happen now, obviously, so that people can be recognized while they’re still here to appreciate it, so I appreciate your testimony and Happy Valentine’s Day.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Happy Valentine’s Day to both of you and I couldn’t agree more with your comments. I think perhaps on the federal side, since there were so many women that served and there were some costs associated with -- this is just my own conjecture, I’m not really sure why it has received a stumbling block from the congressional side, but it may have had to do with the cost and that’s why the current bill that will be in front of the U.S. Senate has no cost associated with it. These women are just asking for the dignity to have their status -- to be recognized as veterans, so thank you very much. Thank you both for staying here.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and I’m going to reach out to our counterpart federal Veterans’ Affairs and see what the status is as far as federal recognition and I know that, you know, so many during World War II stepped up back home and my
grandmother was, I think they called it, an air warden where, you know, everything had to be blacked out, right, all the homes and the buildings and they would wear the badge and they would police the neighborhood and, you know, everybody had a role and took a lot of pride in their support and the part that they played to keep our country safe and certainly the nurses are an exceptional asset to that.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): As Senator Osten pointed out this morning, they’re really the last uniformed service that has not received their veteran status, so thank you both again very much and have a good day.

REP. BORER (115TH): You, too. Okay, our next speaker is John DeMello.

JOHN DEMELLO: I think it’s noon, now, I think it might have changed, but good afternoon, Madam Chair, and Representative Vail. My name is John DeMello. I am -- I oversee the veterans committee for the town of Southington, a great thing. As a matter of fact, Chairman Saadi talked about where the 169 towns either have a veterans’ contact person or a committee and we formulated it back in 2013 this started. We finally got an office in the Town Hall and it’s amazing. I just want to give you a little idea who I am. I’m a Vietnam era veteran. I utilize the VA. I have PTSD. I’m a retired police officer. I work for not only local. I work for state and federal agencies over my career. The reason I’m here is to talk about the bill relating to the Green Alert. As a police officer, the one thing that concerned us is when a complaint or information came in, we wanted to get as much
information as we could and in this case, this happened in Wisconsin in 2017. I know in 2018, I wrote my state representatives and senators and advised them about this bill and told them that it’s a great bill such as, you know, the Amber Alert, the Silver Alert, but the Green Alert is a little different because it involves veterans.

What you want to know is you want to know what the situation is, are they suicidal, are they off their medications, what’s happening with them because the first responders need to know what you’re dealing with and as a police officer, I’ve dealt with a few veterans. When I was in the military, I was in the military police corps and dealt with a lot of Vietnam era veterans that have flashbacks, a lot of things that were happening with them. A lot of times they’d go off and some did commit suicide, but if we could have got to them, maybe we could have helped them, but this Green Alert is something that is so important. Like I said, Wisconsin had it. Connecticut I don’t know if it would be the second state, but it’s very important to get to these veterans when they go missing, try to find them before they either hurt themselves or hurt somebody else and that’s what I wanted to come here to say today and how meaningful it is.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well, thank you and thank you for joining us a few weeks ago when we were in attendance in Rocky Hill.

JOHN DEMELLO: Oh, yeah, I got to go there today, as a matter of fact. We’ve got a meeting again, but yeah, it was a pleasure meeting you.
REP. BORER (115TH): It was very informative, so we had a lot of great notes that we took away from those meetings, so thank you, that was good.

JOHN DEMELLO: And I know Commissioner Saadi spoke about that Bill 7064, very important. Like I said, the town of Southington has had this since 2013 when it first came out. We didn’t have an office, but let me tell you something, it is so amazing. The veterans that are coming out or the families trying to figure out hey, how do I get help, how do I do this. Actually, you’re a resource center. You’re supposed to resource everything out. In Southington, we have a major ability to work with so many other people, not only the state VA, the federal VA, but within our community, community services, Bread-For-Life, all of these that come in to this perspective to helping veterans and it’s getting better.

You know, veterans for a long time were never looked upon as a good veteran. They, you know, especially out of Vietnam, there was nothing there. Yeah, you had help, you go, but the VA got better and the system is working better now to find veterans and to help them and it’s amazing. I know I wasn’t supposed to talk about Bill 7064 --

REP. BORER (115TH): No, that’s okay.

JOHN DEMELLO: -- but I just wanted to talk about this.

REP. BORER (115TH): So 7064 puts a little bit more formality around the process of assigning a volunteer and, you know, the education, the annual education, but it doesn’t talk to that volunteer
being located in City Hall, but it sounds like you’re specifically located in City Hall?

JOHN DEMELLO: Well, some aren’t. Well, most of them are contact person within the town, but a lot of times they don’t do anything. The veteran has to reach out to them. Well, we reach out to a lot of veterans and their families and we’re getting calls. It’s not like a veterans’ organization. They’re coming to the town and it’s amazing. They want to talk, they want to do things, they want to find out things and it’s amazing. Hundreds -- Since we got this office in March, hundreds, we helped hundreds out. It’s amazing how they’re coming out and looking for help, you know.

REP. BORER (115TH): How are you getting the word out to the veterans to come forward?

JOHN DEMELLO: Do you know what we did, press releases, word of mouth, I mean, it’s amazing. We did a Vietnam veterans recognition back on November 11th and it was amazing. Two hundred and fifty people came out and it was just a small scale thing that we were doing at that time, but once the word goes out through the media, letting people know through your local newspapers, we’ve had people come from other towns. We don’t turn anybody away and we help them and it’s amazing. It’s so gratifying, too.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well, thank you for all the work that you do --

JOHN DEMELLO: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): -- in that role. Do you have any questions?
REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay, again, good to see you again.

JOHN DEMELLO: Nice seeing you, too.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Madam Chair for allowing me to speak. So the Green Alert bill, it’s good to get your perspective, not only as a veteran, but as a police officer and it’s good. I’m starting to understand better how it would work and I think you stating that it’s important that we now the background with the veteran, if they’re suicidal, things like that, that makes it a little bit different even than those other alert systems. Is that correct?

JOHN DEMELLO: Yes, sir, that’s correct because -- and this Green Alert, it needs to be modified a little bit more because when you’re a police officer and you’re dealing with people, you need to know if that person may be homicidal, might want to go out and hurt somebody. Even though it says when you’re lost, I think it needs to encompass -- because veterans are a unique group of people and you need to talk to a veteran in a certain way, you know, they don’t want to talk to a fireman, they want to talk to each other, you know, and a lot of times we reached out to help people that were veterans that needed to talk to somebody. We’re having difficult times and that’s an amazing feat in itself because I had the opportunity to talk to many veterans and we actually have -- we started a coffee hour in Southington every month and the veterans that come out just to meet other veterans and talk, women, their families, and the veterans, the guys themselves, too, and it’s an amazing thing and they
talk to each other to give -- a lot of times to make contacts.

If they’re having problems, they’ll give each other a call, which is great, you know, so -- but that Green Alert is something special that needs to be put out there for veterans in order to let first responders know what they’re dealing with, what’s happening, whether they went missing, whether they’re going to go harm themselves, hurt somebody else, there’s a variety of things that could come out regarding that bill, but it really is important. I think it would be great for the veterans to have that and their families so when they call, immediate action can be taken.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay, thank you, and again I appreciate that perspective and also on 7064, you know, we’re going to look to fine tune that a little bit to make it better for those veteran representatives, but of you, since you’re having so much success in Southington, if you could reach out to your friends across the state and maybe let them know the success you’re having and what they’re doing, I think that would be great. I think we don’t -- we don’t certainly need to solve all of Connecticut’s problems here in this building that if you’re having something that’s successful and you can share that information with the other people, I think that would be great, so thank you.

JOHN DEMELLO: I appreciate that and I will do that.

REP. BORER (115TH): You took the words right out of my mouth. You’re a great model in Southington, so thank you for everything you’ve done.
JOHN DEMELLO: Thank you very much. Have a good day.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Okay, last but not least, Representative Buckbee.

REP. BUCKBEE (67TH): Good morning. So I’ve submitted written testimony and this comes specifically from a personal request for House Bill 5464, using military identification. I had a singular instance that became a wonderful topic that we can avoid moving forward, so having a veteran approach me that he went into a state building and was demanded that he use not his military ID, they wouldn’t accept that as his identification to get into the building. He was insulted by it, he was embarrassed by it, and it led to a further discussion of so many veterans that we have now is an aging population that may not have a driver’s license anymore who when he went to walk in, this should be the most respected identification an individual in this state or any other state to hand over for identification to enter a state building and he was denied that. He was told you have to have a driver’s license. He wouldn’t take his military ID.

So while I never would -- I won’t say never -- I wouldn’t normally bring forth a change in the statutes for a singular circumstance. I think in this situation, it’s an identifying problem before it becomes a problem and so identifying the respect that’s deserved to the people that this committee truly represents so well and I would ask that you give it a shot. I think it’s a wonderful opportunity for these veterans to be recognized in a way that they deserve when they walk into a
building. It’s really a tip of the hat and an honor to them to be able to show that ID and to be told you can’t come into the building for that is the wrong thing to do. I think this bill would truly send that message.

REP. BORER (115TH): I think Representative Vail has a comment and question for you.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. In this specific -- Good morning, Representative. We have one more minute before it’s afternoon. Was he eventually allowed into the building? What happened at the conclusion of this?

REP. BUCKBEE (67TH): He wasn’t allowed in until he showed his driver’s license. He had to show his state driver’s license to get in as opposed to having his military ID.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. That’s it. Thank you, sir.

REP. BUCKBEE (67TH): Yeah, it’s disappointing that that’s the case, it really is, that he was denied.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Did you have any questions or comments?

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Representative, for bringing this to our attention because I’m thinking about it, which makes sense, and I’m just trying to think of what could be the reasons why the military ID was not being accepted as a normal form of ID.

REP. BUCKBEE (67TH): Agreed.
SEN. LEONE (27TH): Other than to say maybe we as a state or as a country have been used to the Connecticut -- not the Connecticut, the drivers’ licenses’ be the all-purpose ID. Since the military ID is so transferable across the country, doesn’t always denote everything that the driver’s ID does or does not, so it looks like there’s some room for discovery here, so I’ll be curious to see what some of the reasons why. Maybe it wasn’t accepted if there’s some regulatory effect or something, but I think this is a worthy thing to look into and hopefully it’s not something that’s too difficult to be overcome, but it just strikes me that there’s got to be an underlying reason and we need to find out what that reason is so that we know how to fix it.

REP. BUCKBEE (67TH): Agreed.

SEN. LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, Senator Leone, and thank you for bringing this to our attention. I think we’ll evaluate it. I think eventually it probably should move to Public Safety, that’s probably the right purview, but we’ll continue to discuss it in either this committee or moving it forward to that committee.

REP. BUCKBEE (67TH): If that’s the case, I’m -- it’s not about which one it comes from. I think it holds more clout coming from this committee into Public Safety, I would agree with that. It’s not about anyone’s name to it. It’s about getting this thing so we can move forward to it. I think it’s a wonderful opportunity and I thank you all for allowing me to speak on this topic. This means a lot to the veteran that brought it to me and I’ll
make sure that’s heard back home as well. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you for coming forward. Okay, that is the end of our speakers. That concludes our meeting. Do I have to have an adjournment? No? Okay, all right, well, then everybody have a great day. Thank you for participating --

Okay. Do I have a motion to adjourn? Do I have a second? Okay. All in favor? All right, meeting’s adjourned. Thank you.