SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Good morning. We'll call this Public Hearing of the Veteran's Affairs Committee to order. I'd like to start by welcoming. We have two new members on our Committee. Senator Anwar and Representative Zullo. I also would like to thank Fred Camillo, Representative Fred Camillo who is for his service on the Committee. He's actually no longer on this Committee. And we also have a new LCO, so we'd like to welcome our new LCO, Chris Reinhardt, so. And then let's open up for remarks from the Chairs. Do you have any remarks Representative Borer?

REP. BORER (115TH): Yes I do. Thank you Senator Maroney. I would actually like to relinquish my time and my remarks and turn it over to Robert Silverberg who is going to talk about the Save A Suit Program.

ROBERT SILVERBERG: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the time to do this. For those of you who are unaware, Save A Suit is a nonprofit organization that gives suits to Veterans, both mens and womens; we're talking about professional clothing of all kinds for those who cannot afford it so that they can get job interviews. For the last
three years here at the Capital we've had at the end of session a Save A Suit Day where over the last three years we've collected over 2,100 professional outfits for men and women and almost $2,000 in donations. What makes this year’s event a little bit more special is this is the first time we are actually going to have private sector contribution to this.

The Max Cares Foundation is donating $2,500 to the Save A Suit Initiative this year and the reason that that's so important is because for the Save A Suit nonprofits, it costs an average of about $50 per suit to have them tailored, cleaned and shipped to some of these Veterans all across the country. So it almost is as important to be able to collect the money as it is to collect the suits. So for this year we are very, very grateful to the Max Cares Foundation to be able to donate for this.

One of the things that we should probably do is to have a nice bipartisan press conference thanking them for their donation and it's something that I've spoken with the Speaker and certain members of the Committee and would love to see if we couldn't get both sides of the aisle because this is a non-partisan issue, to welcome the Max Cares Foundation for their donations for doing this.

I would also like to see if there's a way we could expand it. All of you represent different municipalities being senatorial or representative districts. If there was a way within your respective towns that we could find a way to collect from either officials or members of the public and have them donated or brought here to the Capital when we have our Save A Suit Day, which is usually the last Thursday before we have our dress-down day. And I wanted to see if there was an opportunity to
address any of the members of the Committee if there are ideas as to how we could get some of your towns to donate toward there. Are there any exchange of ideas as to organized events within your municipalities? But I wanted to thank all of you for the time to be able to bring this up to you and opening up to any questions.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well thank you. First of all I want to thank you for spear heading this for a number of years. It’s a great initiative and I know that there’s a lot of people that benefit from this, and certainly we will arrange for a public thank you for Max and we’re committed to brainstorm and determine how we can collect more suits and how we can disseminate more suits out into our local communities as well, so thank you.

ROBERT SILVERBERG: Oh please, thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Does anyone have any questions? Robert, thank you very much for all your work on this.

ROBERT SILVERBERG: Thank you very much, appreciate it.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay, I was remiss. I did not make our safety announcement so before we go on to the public hearing, in the interest of safety I’d ask you to note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors through which you entered the room are the emergencies exits and our monitored exit signs. In an emergency the door behind the legislatures can also be used. In the event of an emergency please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room go to your left and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit signs to one of the other exits. Please quickly exit the building and follow any
instructions from the Capital 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 and stay away from the exit doors until an all-clear announcement is heard.

As tradition the first hour of our Public Hearing will be for elected officials and state agency representatives. After the one hour if there are any elected officials or representatives we will alternate between them and the general public. Remarks for the general public are limited to three minutes and so we just please as you to be alert of the time. So we'll get started with our elected officials and state agency representatives and our first speaker is General Evon from the Military Department.

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Morning. Good morning Co-Chairs, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer and distinguished members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee. I'm Major General Fran Evon, the Adjutant General and here with me today are some key staff members, Brigadier General Jerry McDonald, the Assistant Adjutant General Coronel Tim Tomcho, our Staff Judge Advocate and Captain Heineken who is the agency's Legislative Liaison.

Before I begin I'd like to thank Senator Maroney and Representative Boyd who were able to take time out of your business schedules and join us last Friday for an orientation flight to visit our National Guard personnel and facilities throughout the state. Our personnel and our soldiers and airmen were very proud to demonstrate their expertise and equipment and I'd like to continue the program and will be sending another invite in the near future and hope each of you could find the time and be able to find
the time in your schedules to tour and learn more about your Connecticut National Guard.

It's an honor to testify before you today. I thank you for your time and consideration of two military department Bills on the agenda. Senate Bill 860, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAM ACCOUNT, and House Bill 7246, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STATE, CONNECTICUT STATE GUARD, excuse me. Both of these Bills serve to clarify statutory language and ensure the proper and efficient operation of the department's programs. SB 860, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPORT PROGRAM ACCOUNT relates to the department's administration of what is commonly referred to as a 1033 Program. This program permits state governments to borrow surplus Federal military supplies and equipment for the use by state and local law enforcement agencies. Pursuant to the Federal Statute that authorizes the program, the Adjutant General, anyone in my seat has the -- has been designated the Administrator for the State on behalf of the Governor. As the Administrator, the Military Department is responsible for overall accountability of the property including processing applications for supplies and equipment, coordinating its distribution and ensuring its proper disposal or return to the Federal Government. In order to participate in the program, state law enforcement agencies are required to pay a nominal yearly fee based upon the size of the respective department. Annually this amounts to approximately $30,000 that must be utilized to support the program in accordance with Federal law. The Military Department utilizes these funds to administer the program primarily by paying the salary of a member of the State Guard or State Active Duty to run the
program, and I'm going to touch upon those two statues in a few seconds here.

Currently the department does not have a dedicated state account for the program. By passing this Bill the department can ensure proper accounting and safeguarding of the programmatic funds that are required by Federal Law.

House Bill 7246 is AN ACT CONCERNING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STATE GUARD, and it's a resubmission from last session and clarifies the existing statutory language as it relates to the use of State Active Duty and the Connecticut State Guard. By way of background the Connecticut State Guard is not part of the organized militia -- or is part, excuse me, is part of the organized militia and the state armed forces, but it's distinct from the National Guard and Governor's Guard. It's largely an organization comprised of former and retired National Guard members who possess unique skills or knowledge that are of benefit to the Military Department in accomplishing its varied mission sets. Members are not state employees. They're paid from state funds at an equal -- at a rate equal to their federal pay rate of their respective rank in the armed forces of the state and are covered by Workers' Comp while on state active duty. It's a cost-efficient means for the State and Department to accomplish its military missions as they are -- there's no overtime, fringe, no healthcare, or retirement costs.

A previous audit report interpreted our statutes to say that the State Guard could only be called to Active Duty if the entire National Guard was called to Federal Active Duty which is in contravention to our existing practice, utilizing our State Guard when necessary and as a cost-
effective means to accomplish our military needs in a timely manner. A subsequent formal opinion of the Attorney General validated our use of the state guard in accordance with our agency practice. So this Bill clarifies the current statutory language in accordance with that opinion and the current practice in order to avoid future ambiguity. So basically it clean -- it cleans up both of these Bills cleaning up two hits that we've taken over the course of the last, let's say six years from the state audit.

So thank you for your time and consideration of these two important matters. I'm necessary along with the staff here to prepare -- answer any questions that you may have, and as I stated, I look forward to getting you all on one of our tours to meet the personnel and tour facilities. We like to show you the good, the bad and the ugly. And by the way, you get to ride on a UH 60 Black Hawk that's made right here in Connecticut so we're pretty excited. And our young men and women are related elated to get to talk to you as representatives and members of the Congressional Delegation in general, Connecticut and Federal folks as they -- they are really proud of what they do. Proud of serving and they are elated when they get to talk to all of you, so thank you again.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any questions? Representative Boyd.

REP. BOYD (50TH): General, good morning. You know I've always had deep respect for the work of the National Guard and I didn't know what to expect last Friday and to have a such a whirlwind literal tour of all the different tenants of the National Guard Organization was an amazing experience, so I
appreciate all of your staff taking time out of your day to show us what happens and answer your questions and how deep it is. And I would certainly encourage my colleagues to participate in the future because you know, we -- we often get caught up in the day-to-day stuff of governance and we don't see first-hand the good work that you guys do so I appreciate everything you've done and extending out an invitation, so.

Just a quick question dealing with House Bill 74 -- 7246, the Organization of the State Guard. What's a good example of a time in fairly recent that you would call upon the State Guard to be under orders or to be in some type of service?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: I think one example is what was in the testimony so that the Administrator for that law enforcement. I could say also in 2000, I want to say 10, during Super Storm Sandy, we had expertise in their civilian crew. So retired members of the Guard who worked emergency management issues in their civilian careers, again now retired from us, we were actually able to bring them in and work in our Joint Operations Center. So it's an extra set of hands. And at that point in time when it was -- you know it wasn't all in so it wasn't 5,200 guardsman on the different street. I think we were in Fairfield, Bridgeport, New Haven and some other cities and towns; but we were able to bring in expertise so that we can maximize the amounts of -- the amount of soldiers in this case, that we can actually put boots on the ground to assist with the relief efforts. So I think that's one good example. I hope that answers the questions for you.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Yeah, it does. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Are there any other questions from any other members? I also wanted to -- I'm glad Representative Boyd asked that question. I was going to ask that question as well. And also thank you for the opportunity of last Friday. It was very impressive, everything, and especially the -- is it the TAS team facility where they're --

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Yes sir, the TASMG, the Theater Aviation Support Maintenance Group. So they take a -- they take that Black Hawk that we talked about and they strip it right down and do a total refurbishment, yes sir.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): It was very impressive seeing all the different Black Hawks and the different stages of being repaired and very impressive facility.

I was wondering if I could ask you a question about another Bill that's on our agenda. I was wondering if I could ask you about Senate Bill No. 953, especially since it will impact you. It's AN ACT ESTABLISHING A CYBER TECHNOLOGY COMPETITION FOR STUDENTS. Now are there -- now I believe you have a cyber warfare unit, is that correct?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Yes, sir. We currently have 12 members of the Army National Guard that are part of the Cyber Warrior Team currently deployed in Maryland.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): And how -- do you know -- and you may not know off the top of your head, how many different analyzers actually are involved with your cyber -- with computer programming or the cyber warfare?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: So I would say -- we recently this weekend actually, we scrubbed a number -- the number of MOS's I'll say is probably range of
half a dozen to a dozen. This weekend we recently scrubbed both the Army and Air Guard and how many of the coded positions we call them are actual cyber or cyber-like. So some of the treaters for cyber are communications, intelligence and I want to say we cam just shy of 100 folks. Just over 100 that -- that are actually in positions. So for instance, from my belief from your district in Orange the Air Guard Air Control Squadron, they manage air space when they deploy. They have a radar that's currently up on the highest point on the -- at least in Connecticut and they monitor traffic on the east coast. But the majority of that unit, or a significant part of that unit are what we consider Cyber Warriors by their Air Force specialty skill which is similar to MOS. They call it the AFSCE on the Air Force side.

REP. MORIN (28TH): Thank you. And currently I believe you are doing some outreachers for third to fifth graders and can you tell me a little bit more about that?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Yes, sir. So the Department of Defense, it's a federally sponsored program. We call the Star Base Program. Their -- their tag line is Hands on and Mind On so it's third to fifth graders. I believe they do 25 hours. The school district's responsibility is the transportation to one of our facilities and it's very -- I'd love to have you all to a graduation. They're working with -- their building their ability and probably future Cyber Warriors- they are building their ability to -- there's 3-D printers. They're programming different things and we have certified teachers that are running the program and we administer, like I said it's a -- it's a Department of Defense federally funded program.
SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): And do they have -- I believe they have some engineering programs to that? Do they -- I don't know if they have anything specifically cyber-related to it's --

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: So it's -- that's a great question, Senator. We're actually with Congressional Delegation. They have a whole menu of courses on -- and typically -- it's not always -- we're fighting now for the funding of the current program but we're postured for growth looking to expand and I want to believe out of -- out of the menu of 24, maybe two dozen different programs, there are three that relate directly to cyber.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay.

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Does that make sense?

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): So it wouldn't be a stretch to find something from there that we could use, I guess related to some form of a cyber challenge. I know Michigan, they have a Governor's cyber challenge and Yukon sponsors that hack-a-thon or something like that.

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: So we currently do a program with also the technical high schools as it relates to testing and licensing. We are eagerly trying to get involved with robotics so that also is in the cyber realm. I know in the resource guide that we gave everyone last Friday one of -- and we're securing Federal funding. I'm hoping to get a purchase request in by the end of this month, but a stem trailer that we'd be able to bring to schools specifically for us -- to high schools that would assist in our branding, our marketing, and oh by the way, our recruiting. So we -- we turn over a significant amount of people every year so we need to regenerate that engine year to year. We have a
Federal mission on the Army side to recruit about 850 soldiers to use that stem trailer and many other youth-like programs to plant the seed for those younger generations who want to raise their right hand to be part of something larger than themselves. And oh by the way, thanks to all your help. The legislature back in the late 80s we have the Tuition Waiver so 100 percent tuition waiver to state universities and colleges and that's one of our larger selling points as we talk to the youth of Connecticut.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. So I mean given that a lot of great advances in the -- in the internet and technology have come from people who are either in the military, I mean the internet was born out of the Department of Defense, or people who were in the military and have left and then have developed a lot of new technology. Do you think that this is something that would assist you with recruiting and helping to get that message out to parents who may not be aware of those opportunities?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Yes, absolutely Senator. I think it would. We have like -- like you mentioned, we have a cyber team currently deployed. We also have a state partnership program. Our partnership country is Uruguay. I was briefed earlier this week, we are planning to do a key leader engagement with the Uruguayan military forces and this specific engagement is cyber related, so we're sending some of those same individuals that I talked about earlier down to Uruguay to work with them on the cyber threat so I think it would be a great -- a great mechanism for us to utilize to help us with recruiting, retention and marketing, yes sir.
SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Great. Thank you very much. And then I guess to jump back to 7246, so in effect this is just clarifying an opinion that was issued by the Attorney General so we're just codifying?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Yes, sir.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Codifying that?

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Both those again they clarify in statutes two hits that we've taken on an audit, state audits over the last five to six years at least.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Thank you very much.

MAJOR GENERAL FRAN EVON: Thank you, sir. Thank you all for your time.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Does anyone have any other questions for General Evon? Okay. Thank you very much for your time, General. And before we call up the next person, Representative Vail would like to introduce our new member.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I -- we have a new member here in our Caucus. You mentioned it earlier, Representative Joe Zullo and I'd like to give him an opportunity to introduce himself to the Committee if we could?

REP. ZULLO (99TH): Good morning everybody. I'm Attorney Joe Zullo. I'm the State Representative from the 99th Assembly District. That's most of East Haven for those of you who are unfamiliar. This is an exciting new endeavor for me. Veterans are very near and dear to my heart and we have a very large Veteran contingent so in East Haven so I'm very eager to sit here. I'm very eager to hear about all the great initiatives we have here and
everything that we can do for everything who has
done so much for all of us. So thank you for having
me. Thank you for welcoming me to the Committee. I
know we have a lot to get through today so I won't
take up anymore of the air in the room, so thank you
again.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. With that, the
next is Commissioner Saadi.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Morning Senator -- Senator
Maroney, Representative Borer, Senator Abrams,
Representative Boyd, Ranking Member Vail and team
members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee. I
appreciate the opportunity to address you today.
I also to thank our Veterans who are here today
for their service and sacrifice on behalf of our
nation. While the Department supports many of the
Committee's raised Bills, my testimony will focus
on those that directly impact the Department's
operations and services. Also with me today is
Ryan McKenna the Manager of the Department's
Office of Advocacy and Assistance.

I thank the Committee for raising Senate Bill 861,
REGARDING THE DEFINITION OF SERVICE AND TIME OF
WAR AND STATE RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS. This
codifies existing practice by removing the two year
state statutory residency requirement for
admission to the Department's Residential Services
program. This Bill also removes redundant text
from the definition of Wartime Service and
clarifies that qualifying wartime service may be
less than the 90 days if separation from the
military was due to an injury in the line of duty
whether or not it is service-connected disabled.

The issue of Veterans mental health and the
recognition of signs and symptoms of mental health
illness is exceptionally important. However,
while well intentioned, SB 952 imposes a mandate on the department to duplicate existing resources and training available through the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs, state agencies and community-based nonprofits. As I often say, there is not a lack of programs and services but rather a lack of connecting those in need to the available programs and services. As such, the Department has made these resources, a partial list of which is attached to my written testimony, available through a quick link on the DVA's website for Connecticut employers and the community and for anyone else who would like to do research in this issue and avail themselves of the training opportunities.

The DVA opposes House Bill 7137, which seeks to mandate the assignment of five Office of Advocacy and Assistance staff to drive Veterans to medical appointments and job interviews. Although well intentioned, this does not align with the goal of the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, which is to represent Veterans and their eligible dependents in claims for pensions, benefits, and programs with the federal VA.

In fiscal year 2018 alone the Office of Advocacy and Assistance responded to nearly 30,000 phone calls, many more emails and filed nearly 2,000 and re-opened appeals resulting in over $5 million in new benefits for our Connecticut's Veterans. The Department recognizes that transportation can be a challenge, and as a member of the recently-established task force to study public transportation needs for among others, Connecticut's Veterans. The Department also works with Veterans organizations and Veterans in need to connect them with existing transportation. I have attached partial list of these opportunities
to my written testimony, which is also available at each district office at the Office of Advocacy and Assistance.

I respectfully request consideration in maintaining the Department's ability to focus OA&A staff on securing benefits and programs for our Veterans and I know I'm probably over my time, but there is one other Bill I'd like to comment on if I may without objection?

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Yes.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Senator.

Regarding House Bill 7138, it is important to understand that the OASIS centers were established by the Board of Regents for Higher Education to serve student Veterans by assisting them with academic studies creating a friendly environment where Veteran students can interact amongst other students and integrate into school and society with other students.

As such, the Department is concerned with the underlying premise of the Bill that has the Department identifying the means for expanding these services of existing OASIS centers to non-students. This presupposes that it is an appropriate transformation -- appropriate to transform these student Veteran-focused centers into community Veteran centers. I would respectfully caution that such mandated expansion could potentially negatively impact the capacity of the limited resources in the existing centers to carry out their primary and current mission for their student Veterans.

I thank you for your time and your service to our state and I am happy to respond to any questions you may have.
SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Good morning.

REP. VAIL (52ND): You mentioned Senate Bill 952. You had concerns about it but you just -- were you opposed to that Bill or you just have concerns about it? I didn't know if you had made a statement regarding that.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I am opposed to the Department being mandated to develop a training manual because I believe that the subject matter experts who have -- have millions of patients quite literally, the Federal VA; and hundreds of thousands of professionals over decades study these issues, have a broad-range of resources that are available, we work with them. They actually hold annual seminars and training sessions for employers in community-based organizations to identify signs and symptoms of mental health in Veterans and how to address and refer them. And those links are all available and we will push out through social media and other means to all of our municipal Veterans point of contact as well as our statewide Veteran service organizations, the quick link to all those services and more than happy to again, you know make that available through CBIA or other points of contact. But I believe it would be redundant to have the Department develop a training manual where that -- those materials and those resources exist. We just need to connect those in need of those resources to the existing programs and services.
REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. Thank you very much for that. And one more question. You said you were appointed to the Task Force. Is that in regard to the Task Force that was passed last year in legislation about transportation for seniors and -

COMMISSIONER SAADI: It is. Yes, it is.

REP. VAIL (52ND): The last -- I know that Task Force hadn't met yet so how recent was that appointment and are you scheduled to meet anytime soon?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I've delegated the representation of the Department to one of my staff. I will have to get back to you as to that staff member receiving notice of when that Task Force will be meeting. But I can tell you that with the current administration they are going through and reaching out to Commissioners, they've at least reached out to me to ask what Task Forces, what Commissions do we serve on? When have they met and how can we move them forward so we'll be working with -- with the Task Force on scheduling a meeting and giving our input.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. I appreciate that. That's long overdue. Thank you.

Senator Maroney (14th): Representative Ferraro, then Representative Boyd.

REP. FERRARO (117th): Thank you, Mr. Chair and great to see you there Commissioner Saadi and congratulations on your reconfirmation.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you very much.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Probably the most bipartisan unanimous confirmation I've ever seen.
COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you very much, Representative. I appreciate it.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Which is a testament what you do and your job. I just have a question regarding the 7138 Bill regarding the OASIS. My experience with OASIS is exactly as you described it. It's a gathering place for Veterans who are students and the items that seem to be addressed there are anywhere from doing a procedure all the way through personal and you know, issues with PTSD and what have it and it's highly personal and highly interactive for the students. And I'm kind of sharing your concern here regarding limited budget and the idea that this can be opened up to the general community at large. Is that your reading on this; is that any Veteran would be able to attend the OASIS facility and take part in the benefits applied -- given there to the Veterans, student Veterans?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: That's how I'm reading the Bill and that it's a mandate on the Department to identify how to do that and that is what I'm uncomfortable with as an agency, as a Commissioner looking at that both for having the Department do it as -- as opposed to potentially the Board of Regents opining upon it but also just the logistics of expanding a student Veteran focus center established with that mission and taking it from that primary mission and expanding it without a more informal research or discussions before such a mandate would be passed.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): What percentage of allocated resources and time would you guess the Veterans participating in the OAS -- OASIS areas are -- are directly related to student issues?
COMMISSIONER SAADI: That would be information or data that I would have to obtain from the Board of Regents or from the individual 12 community college or four state colleges and the on-line college. I don't have that offhand, Representative, I apologize.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Okay. And through you Mr. Chair, just a follow up on that. The protected or projected benefits that outside community members would get by attending the OASIS, in your opinion, those benefits are available through outside sources other than the OASIS facility?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I think in most cases there are community based organizations, Veteran service organizations, Vet centers and a -- a broad range of program, services, and organizations that can provide them. There may be some communities that don't have that depth or breadth of those community-based organizations while others have them. But I do believe there are significant again, opportunities for Veterans, community-based Veterans to avail themselves of those resources through other means aside from the OASIS centers.

That being said, it's not something that I'm saying should not ever happen but I believe that it's probably better -- a better course of action to have an information discussion with Board of Regents, with the colleges to see if that's something that would make sense. As well as include community-based Veteran leaders in that discussion.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): And just one more followup. In your opinion the resources allocated to the OASIS program, are they stretched at this point? And would the addition of outside Veterans other
than student Veterans, stretch those resources beyond what they're capable of?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I'll do my best to respond to that and if I'm incorrect I'll ask Mr. McKenna to comment as well. But the OASIS Centers as I understand them, are staffed differently. There could be volunteers, there could be some paid staff depending on the available resources within that particular educational institution. So they're very different. In fact one of them is for -- is an online college as well. I believe it's Charter Oak? Charter Oak is all on line. So they range. And I know that some are very small in the footprint, others are larger. So there is no one model or one design for them. But what I can say, and correct if I'm wrong Mr. McKenna, that without a depth of either research or review or discussion I think it would likely stretch those resources, which right now are consistent with the mission of serving student Veterans. And I think we can all appreciate that over the last decade and a half of the ongoing conflicts, this is something that universities recognize as an issue and wanted to engage in this mission so they could support those students that to serve, and serve them additionally through OASIS Centers in recognition of their serve to our country.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Commissioner for those answers. And usual you do a great job and thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Representative Boyd and then Representative Borer and then Senator Leone.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman again. Commissioner, thank you for all you do and coming before us again. I want to continue the
discussion a little bit about OASIS Centers. Just pulling the outside piece aside, you know pretending that that part does not exist, so you're trying to serve the greater community. Do you know of any type of survey that's been done of our state university or college system to see what is being offered at each of the campuses?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Do you mean programs and services that are specifically offered for Veteran students?

REP. BOYD (50TH): So my understanding is that a good majority of our state universities and community colleges have an OASIS Center or some equivalent to in some way, shape or form, but I also understand that all of them don't. And I guess what we're trying to ascertain with this Bill is, do we actually have a good handle on what's being offered across the state? And the second layer to that is there any consistency to what's out there?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: It's my understanding Representative, that all 12 of the community colleges under the Board of Regents as well as the four state universities aside from Yukon, and Yukon may have one but they're under a different organization. They have a Board of Trustees. All have OASIS Centers including Charter Oak, which is an online system through the Board of Regents. And Yukon also does have one, Mr. McKenna? Yukon refers to theirs as a Veteran Center. So Yukon, Eastern Central Southern, and Western all have OASIS and the 12 community colleges do have OASIS Centers. I'm not aware of a general survey of how they are set up or exactly the programs and services that each one offers. That would be something I believe, I'm sure that the Board of
Regents may have or could potentially be able to provide. But they are all operational.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Yeah. Okay. Well that's helpful. I mean part -- again part of the intent I believe with this is to try to get a sense on what we're going across the state and you know, could one university have some great program and they have a great setup, could that be a model that you know college B who may have a resource person but not have an extensive amount of programs. Is there much interaction between your department and the Board of Regents, when it deals with student services?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: There's not a significant amount of interaction with the Board of Regents, however, we do have I would say a reasonable amount of contact with the OASIS Centers. When I first came on under the former Commissioner we did a tour and went around to OASIS Centers across the state. We stay in contact in particular through the Office of Advocacy and Assistance as well as my community outreach, the one person I had in my community outreach office, and stay in touch with them. We also look to if there are organizations in the community that are looking in their area, the geographic area to assist or to donate or to help, we direct them to, among other things, the OASIS Centers if that's a place where they can volunteer and help. It is something where it would be reasonable within the university system if they would share best practices --

REP. BOYD (50TH): Right.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: They may already do that. And to look at models rather than reinventing the wheel --
REP. BOYD (50TH): Sure.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Look at how someone has made a better wheel.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Yep, yeah exactly. And I think this Committee feels very strongly in the value of OASIS Centers and you know the Board of Regents, they have a lot on their plate and you know, as advocates we want to make sure that -- that we're able to offer the best services to our students in our system and be able to enable them to -- to do that and expand within -- within reason and I think also advocate for allocations when it comes to supporting these programs, so, thank you.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative Boyd.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Representative Borer.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, Commissioner and congratulations as well.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.

REP. BORER (115TH): I just want to address the transportation issue because we have two Bills in that are related to transportation. So we have 7134, AN ACT CONCERNING BUS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION AND VETERANS and we have the 7137, the one establishing the drivers. And I think those Bills were created because when we were in Rocky Hill and we were talking the leaders of all the organizations that was a recurring issue that kept coming up. Access to transportation or coordination of transportation for Veterans to healthcare or to services, employment opportunities. So I know we -- we had a Task Force that was -- that really didn't take its
course that it should have. But besides the Task Force, what are your thoughts as an agency leader about how we can improve transportation?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: The first thing is to look at some of the very things you are looking at. The issues of public transportation. What instruments of transportation are already in existence that Veterans can be connected with, maybe to assist them with the cost of that through some sort of program.

The other thing is, and I appreciate that you and Senator Maroney were there and Representative Vail, and thank you for coming to our campus and meeting with our statewide Veteran service leaders, come of who are here today. And part of that discussion also was some of the organizations that do provide transportation service are saying that they have it, but no one is contacting them or they have the vehicles but may not have a volunteer driver. And to try to connect organizations with each other and volunteers with those organizations to try to be a force multiplier for them. The DAV, the American Legion, the Federal VA all provide transportation services. Now some of these transportation services may be for a Veteran who is not a VA-eligible Veteran who is just going to a private provider. Those could be areas of concern.

My main concern here is mandating that the department take five people from a full staff of how many do you -- and how many Veteran Service Officers? Seven Service Officers and seven support staff, several of whom are part-time assigning nearly 40 percent of the OA&A staff to drive Veterans around is not the appropriate use of these highly trained individuals who represent
Veterans and claims of benefits that generate millions of dollars in income to those individuals who are here in the State of Connecticut and connects them with VA services, connects them with transportation services that are in existence. Hypothetically you could have one person out of our Norwich office who would have to drive up to Bethlehem, Connecticut and then drive the individual another hour, half an hour somewhere, wait for them and then bring them home and then return back to the state office in Norwich. I don't think that that is the way to approach the transportation issue, but there are several Bills I know that the Committee has -- is reviewing or has raised regarding donation of vehicles, regarding public transportation and either a reduced cost or no cost. Those types of approaches can be very helpful.

And I would defer to Mr. McKenna with regard to the driving and coordinating of transportation for our Veterans. If you could address -- it may be antidotal rather than evidentiary based directly but how your Veteran Service Officers address transportation concerns when they come into your district offices?

MR. MCKENNA: Good morning. Ryan McKenna, Manager Advocacy and Assistance. So the Commissioner is definitely spot on there with the transportation concern. Our Veteran Service Officers have the list of all the transportation services that are available in their districts, in their offices right by their phone during a given time. Like he was reference -- referencing for person in 2nd District, the Service Officers are -- that's a 65 town district that covers the entire eastern half of the state. So if a Veteran is in -- has an appointment in West Haven, the service officer
lives in say Dayville and has to go to North Stonington to pick that Veteran up to make an appointment, is an entire day for one appointment. But that Veteran or that service officer could be in the office taking control of say 30 phone calls and an additional two or three visits from Veterans that are coming in for appointments for claims. So, the Commissioner is definitely spot on with that.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for that. So we have the resources and we have the Veterans in need but we still have a disconnect. So what can we do to better connect them to the services? I know the Service Officers, if they call in, can connect them but we're still hearing that there's a challenge with the transportation. So how do we get word to the Veterans that these services exist?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I'll respond. Representative, there will always be gaps. There will not be necessarily available transportation services for every need, for every Veteran and if I'm correct, this also included transportation to interviews for employment as well, which I'm very concerned about. That goes well outside of the capacity when you're talking about getting people to medical appointments, that should be the primary. Medical appointments, getting to the VA, getting to community-based providers consistent with the Mission Act. We will do and continue to expand our capacity to connect eligible Veterans to these transportation services. I cannot tell you that there will never be a gap or a need for more. But what I urge the Committee is not to look at assigning those who are actively involved in representing Veterans free of charge in claims and benefits to reassign them in this manner. We
can continue and absolutely meet and have a dialogue as to how we can better connect individuals with transportation services, reach out, push this information actually to our municipal Veterans representative that we train annually. Get these transportation services out to them and see if there continues to be a serious impact. You know, some of the organizations that provide the transportation services have told us, we have available services. Sometimes people don't want to utilize them. That happens. They would rather go in their own vehicle or have a family member; the schedule may not be as convenient for them. So while there may be -- continue to be some challenges and gaps, I think we can do more in connecting again as I said earlier, those in need with the existing programs and services while you continue to look at other ways to expand within existing assets whether it is donation of vehicles, whether it is public transportation, whether it is grants to community-based providers and regions to assist with providing vehicles to organizations to have volunteers drive these individuals to their appointments.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. And I can appreciate that. I think you know, just for the record, this Bill was to add drivers, not create driving responsibilities for the Service Officers that already exist. So I just want to make sure I clarify that. So I know there will always be gaps. I think my question is how do we -- how do we today market to the Veterans? So do the hospitals, if somebody calls for an appointment, do the hospitals have in front of them, oh you can call this service officer and they can help you arrange transportation. Does the -- does the
medical society know that these services -- I'm just trying to figure out the link to connecting them so we can help you connect the Veterans to the transportation resources.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I don't know if every medical provider in the state would have these but this is information we can push out through the various medical associations and societies to make available again. I can't say that every person who has served would be eligible for these, depending on their characterization of discharge or the time that they served, particularly on Federal Active Duty or not. We discuss that issue with regard to who qualifies or not as a Veteran. But we can push the information out and -- community-based providers, to the medical associations or hospital associations to make sure they have them. But the West Haven VA, Newington and Providence all have these. Our District offices all have these transportation lists, and to the extent that any Veteran service organization doesn't have them, I think most of them do, we can push that out to our statewide Veteran service leaders points of contact.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great. Thank you and probably the Workforce Development Labor Organizations as well. It kind of leads into Bill 7247, which you had addressed about connecting the resources. We have all these great resources and we briefly talked about 211. And I' wondering if there's an opportunity when somebody calls into 211, one of the first questions is, are you a Veteran? And it points them to a whole menu of services separate than -- not separate than 211 because the services in 211 are critical as well. But somehow connect them if they're a Veteran to other resources.
COMMISSIONER SAADI: That's an excellent question because there have been informal campaigns called Have You Ever Served? Rather than asking the, are you a Veteran? Sometimes people don't know whether they are or not, again based on the service that they -- that they gave to their country depending whether there's active duty or not and Federal orders after being part of the Reserve or Guard. That being said, there very well could be and should be, have you ever served question. Some states do that? Many organizations do that and if they have ever served, then those individuals can be referred to either the websites or the phone number for the State Department of Veterans Affairs or the Federal VA where they can then be linked to those services and we can direct them to where they can be -- where we can determine through their service records whether they're eligible for Connecticut state-based benefits or whether or not Mr. McKenna's Veteran Service Officers can represent them in claims before the Federal VA.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's great. Some I'm wondering if on 7247 there might be an opportunity -- I don't know if we -- we required that legislatively to be -- if that would be a legislative direction to direct how 211 operates but there might be an opportunity in that Bill to suggest exactly that, the question up front. And just one other question. I know I'm jumping around, I'm sorry. Back to the transportation. On the Bill about public transportation and access to the buses, what are your thoughts on that? And have you looked at that before?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I believe this issue came up in the past and the depart -- the issue -- the concern was would the Department of Veterans
Affairs, the State Department of Veterans Affairs would be the clearinghouse or the agency to determine eligibility. But there weren't standards that had been discussed, whether there would be a means test or what the level of proof would be. And at the time I raised concerns that again it's a staffing issue to take on another program and under OA&A and others we have, as you learned, a multitude of programs that do not have funding lines and are absorbed within our existing staff that that was a concern.

I believe the current legislation, if I'm correct, refers to either a Veteran ID or the state driver's license or non-driver's license ID which has Veteran indication on it as being the ID. That would take it out of the realm of the Department of Veterans Affairs having to review applications and having people submit their DV214 to us as well as income verification, which was the previous one. It was for those in need. So I would defer to the Department of Transportation from a standpoint of capacity and funding but the agency we have no objection to that as a matter of principal.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay, great. Thank you. And I have asked DOT for the capacity levels by region of the bus transportation just so we could get an idea, because it would -- if there's capacity on the buses it wouldn't cost us anything, is my thought. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Yes.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you, thank you. Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you, Commissioner Saadi for your -- and
congratulations on your reappointment. We're very fortunate to have you for us, the Veterans Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): On 7138 and OASIS, I understand what you're getting at as far as you have so much on your plate to do a study for each university or each college as far as the OASIS. I could envision though for each individual college doing their own internal study but I also could envision, I think it would be good for our younger Veterans that have come from service to meet all of the Veterans from the American Legion posts -- or any of the posts to come just have coffee maybe once a month. I don't know how you'd feel about that. If the universities did their own study, and they should anyway. I think -- I think each one should do, how's it working? You know, have a -- have a dialogue. How's it going? And they could also send that report to the Department of Veteran Affairs. So I do agree that it's -- I think it would be too much of a mandate for your department. But I also could see the colleges doing it and having maybe once a month -- having like some folks come in or you know, some service members come in and just have a cup coffee and just see how things are going and just talk to one another. So I don't know how you feel about that.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Well I can tell you, you mentioned coffee and some of you may be aware of this, that there are Veteran coffee houses. These are community-based organizations informally created across the State of Connecticut where sometimes it could be up to a hundred or more Veterans who will get together or smaller groups will get together in a restaurant, at a coffee
house, wherever it might be, at a venue to just meet informally whether it's monthly or quarterly and bring in speakers. That being said, I know anecdotally that OASIS organizations within the community college and university system often times do reach out to community-based Veterans organizations and have them either attend or speak or participate with them, or the Veterans, the student Veterans who are participating in the OASIS Centers are themselves members. Whether it be the Legion or the DAV or whatever Veteran service organization it is, the VFU and so they do connect. But I agree with you, Representative that -- and I'm sure the universities do this because they consistently as a matter of a best practice, review their programs and services to see how their functioning, that that could be something that they could look at. I don't want to say that they're not doing it because I know anecdotally that some do do that very well in their communities.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. So we're in agreement basically because I think it would be -- as much as I want to see it happen I think it's just too much for your department really to go to every university and I think it's incumbent on the universities and the students and the Veterans to have that dialogue and how to survey and a study and they can fill it out and send it off to your department and you could review it or have somebody review it either quarterly or yearly.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: And Representative, any way we can assist, we are there within our staffing capacity to support OASIS Centers and other community-based organizations or educational institutional organizations in any way whether we're guiding them or providing them with best
practices based on our experiences, or connecting them with community-based Veterans or organizations.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. So if it's -- maybe with the Chairs on the Committee could look at the Bill and maybe change the language as far as letting the -- reversing it and have the universities do their own internal study and then sending it off to -- we could -- to Veterans Affairs. Thank you, Commission and --

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Yes, we can work with you -- work with you on that. Representative Ferraro for the second time.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair for recognizing me for the second time. Just one more question on the -- on the OASIS and then I want to go to the transportation. Have you at this point heard from the Board of Regents? Have they weighed in on this particular Bill yet that you know of?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I'm not aware of that, Representative.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Okay. And let's go to the transportation and we were talking about one of the best options was a donation of vehicles. Am I correct in assuming that the DAS would be the agency of cognoscente with regard to donating vehicles?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Yes, Representative.
REP. FERRARO (117TH): Okay. And to your knowledge how many vehicles in the last five years have they donated to statewide agencies?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I'm not aware of that number. That would be something that DAS would track regularly. I would refer you to them from the standpoint of the data but --

REP. FERRARO (117TH): I'm pretty sure it's pretty close to zero. So I know this program is in place and I think you're aware that I did put a Bill in --

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Yes.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Regarding donation of such vehicles to nonprofits and the response I've gotten so far from DAS is we already do that. And the question is, if you have the capability to do it and it's not being done, then something needs to be done and so that's the genesis of the Bill I put in and I think that the snag with regards to the Transportation Bill here and the best practice shall we say, lies in the fact that these vehicles need to be donated. There are plenty of vehicles each year that fall below a certain value and they would not hurt, shall we say the state's ability to recover revenue from the state auctions by donating those particular vehicles. And then with regards to drivers, I'm pretty sure there's a lot of retired Veterans and folks who are you know, just looking for something to do that would be happy to volunteer their time to drive a Vet here or there and I think if the opportunity were made available, the vehicles were available and somebody took charge of scheduling, I think the staff people you mentioned, the seven officers or 14 people I think, 40 percent, somebody in house could be assigned to scheduling pickups and things
like that and make much better use of their time than driving people around the state. So just a few suggestions with regards to that and if you can maybe follow up with DAS and find out you know, where, you know if and they are donating these vehicles, how many and is there any opportunity to get more vehicles donated to those agencies that actually need them.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Will do, Representative. As you were speaking I was making some notes here specifically to do that, exactly what you said. To connect with DAS and again, I think it goes back to the issue of again there are programs and services that are available that maybe individuals who could avail themselves and I simply don't know. You don't know what you don't know --

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Right.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: As I often say, so if we can connect DAS with our statewide Veterans service organizations as well as other providers that may be looking for those vehicles. On the issue of drivers will defer to the organization as to what their standards are from the standpoint of training and insurance, those types of things with regard to the drivers. And we do coordinate to a -- to an extent, transportation but we wouldn't coordinate transportation for an organization. We would coordinate transportation with an organization. So we will circle back on that and again, with social media with our website pushing information out to our statewide Veterans service organizations and our municipal representative point of contact, I believe we have nearly all 169 towns in our email blast communication list that we now stay in touch with and we can push this information out to them.
REP. FERRARO (117TH): That's great. So if we can accomplish that goal, get the vehicles in the right places and be able to get those Veterans rides to medical services and job interviews and we can maybe squeeze my Bill through and get those Veterans who actually want to work and drive daily back and forth daily to a job, I think we're on the right track because I've always felt that a full tank of gas and a vehicle and a new suit will go a long way for every Veteran. Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? Okay. I'll ask my questions then, so. Commissioner, if we can go back to Senate Bill 952. So just being cognoscente of the fact that you have limited staff and limited resources and also there's really no need to re-invent the wheel, however, also being aware of that as you said, you don't know what you don't know and while we do have a lot of great resources available they're not necessarily getting out to the employers or to the people who need this information. Would you be willing to work to massage the Bill lets say to perhaps create a working group that would consist of you know, Representative -- within available appropriations, create a working group from Veterans Affairs, the Department of Labor, the Workforce Investment Boards and I think you had mentioned CBIA to aggregate and any other potential volunteers that are -- you know we could think of to name. But who would be willing to aggregate this information and work to distribute it to employers?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I have no objection to that specifically, Senator. But what I can tell you is
when I say we established a quick link we actually went live on the DVA website yesterday with the link to, and I'll just enumerate very quickly. The Federal Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Employee Too Kit -- Tool Kit, which has within it multiple resources including training videos and manuals, suicide awareness and prevention. The Veterans Crisis Hotline which includes a range of resources both for Veterans and those seeking to assist them with mental health issues and crisis. Also a link to the Regional Behavioral Health Action Organizations throughout the State of Connecticut administered by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and local mental health authorities that fall under those regional organizations.

So what I was saying earlier is we can -- we will push this out to all those organizations. I don't have any objection to a collaborate group discussing this and looking for better ways and -- and to improve practices and best practices to share information. I think that is probably one of the most important things, is sharing information, de-siloing as we often hear --

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Yeah.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: And our center of gravity impacts many others around us and we have to remove those silos.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. No, and I agree. We have a lot of -- it seems a lot of organizations doing the same thing but not communicating with each other in different -- whether it's in state government or a number of other areas; there are a lot of silos that we need to break down. So thank you for your testimony
today. Are there any other questions for the Commissioner? Okay. Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you very much.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next, Reverend Holloway.

REV. HOLLOWAY: I'm just loud. I figured you could hear me. All right, my name is Reverend Ernestine Holloway and I represent Meriden Disability Board and I need to be honest. Veterans are a precious commodity. I looked at the list and I was shocked and appalled that we're struggling with transportation issues. Doesn't make sense. If you put them under Medicaid and Medicare and it's not LogistiCare anymore, thank God, but that other guy that you guys give a bunch of money to. And we make it easier for them to have access to it, because I don't know if you ever call just to say you want an appointment for a ride, it takes sometimes an hour, half an hour. So that could be part of the problem 'cause guess what? I don't have PTSD but I sure don't want to be on the phone for an hour waiting for somebody to tell me that yes, I can get a ride to my doctor's appointment or to tell me that it's not essential, or it's not an emergency. And I asked them a question the other day when a Veteran came to me and asked me. I said, well who gave them that authority to say that?

So I think that we have the programs in place. We just have to manage them a little bit better. As far as the busing I can't believe that's an issue because I have a daughter with a disability. All I did was get a doctor to sign a letter, went to the Senior Citizen Center, had them send it in and three weeks later I got a card saying that I could take the bus. So why aren't we making it so simple that they can get the transportation?
I think a lot of this needs to go onto the municipalities. Not to the Commissioner that just left, he's got enough work already. If we put somebody in the municipalities that are aware of these issues, they wouldn't have to come here. Municipalities have to bare their weight. That's where they live. That's where the core of where they're going to go before they come here. And because I represent the Disability Board those are the issues that they come -- what about transportation? How can I get here? Now the problem would be how to get them to an appointment for a job. So why not have that connection in the Senior Center because it's a broad range for disability. What I learned is you could be 23 and have -- have a disability and eligible to use the Senior Citizen Center. So maybe we need to work along with them and the municipality so once you put it there it's a broad range of services that they can get. Because it's in your town where you can go.

You know, I understand that you've got a bunch of laws -- to create a bunch of laws but some of this stuff is just practical, logical. It's not all that deep. We're the ones that make it complicated. They should not be paying for a birth certificate that they can't find. They date -- it's just behooves me that we can give a whole bunch of other people money that shouldn't have money, but they have to come here and excuse my terminology 'cause I'm a street pastor, have to bet somebody to pay for a birth certificate or to get a job or to get housing. And what I told the gentleman and the lady that I was talking to, because I've been homeless I get it. When you lose stuff and can't get a birth certificate and you can't get your Social Security card and
there's nobody there to help you, we shouldn't have these issues with Veterans at all. It's a no-brainer. So maybe if we use the services that we have instead of creating so much more bureaucracy and tell the municipalities off your butt and you need to help them because they're in your area because you guys can't do it all. And unfortunately you can't. I wish you could, but you can't. So why not give everybody a lane and work together?

My other problem is that there is no collaboration. Nobody knows what anybody's doing. So everybody's doing the same thing. But if you do it on the local level and say, okay you're the Disability Board. Veterans fall up under disability services, these are the services in your town 'cause most towns have boards. How do I know? 'Cause I'm on it. And when I was in New York I was on it 'cause I love Veterans. We have to do a better job at taking care of them. They gave their life, their service to this country and, I'm trying not to say that other word 'cause it's not proper and I don't want to repent, but we kind of gave them the short end of the stick. And the reason why I can say this 'cause my sister's a Veteran. And I listen at the Commissioner talking about the age bracket or the time that you serve, that shouldn't be an issue. My sister was in the military. She didn't even stay a year and she was classified disabled but because she didn't classified and she didn't meet what they call the criteria, she can't get services. That makes no sense. You're disabled, you're disabled. We can do that for people but we can't do that for our Veterans. I think that's where we fall short.

And as far as housing, I had a program that I wanted to put forth in Meriden. We got all these
empty factories and houses. What New York City did was they took a factor, they had somebody come in from the private and government sector and what they did was they hired a company to come in and use the Veterans to rehab -- to repurpose that area so they can have housing. They said, well how are we going to pay for it and how are they going to build it? Guess what? They're going to build their own housing. They've got the skill. They know how to blow up stuff, put things together, so why not take them same skills and put them to work to build their housing? And then they said, what about medical care? What I said was, all these students we send to school that owe us money, take that money, tell them we will give you this if you do that and use them to staff it so we don't have to re-do the thing all over again. It's that simple.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Could you summarize the rest of your testimony? Okay.

REV. HOLLOWAY: I'm finished. Done.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there -- are there any questions? Representative Ferraro followed by Representative Yaccarino.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Reverend. What a breath -- breath of fresh air. Common sense street talk. Right to the point and I just want to thank you for your insights and you make a lot of sense and unfortunately sometimes up here we can use a little bit more of it, so thank you very much.

REV. HOLLOWAY: You're very welcome.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Representative Yaccarino.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I just want to thank you for your advocacy for our Veterans and their families. You made common sense as far as housing and as far as riding sharing. We could use like -- local American Legions or Veterans Administration folks to give rides or to communicate so you do make a lot of communi -- a lot of sense. You don't say -- instead of us always doing everything we can do it locally, so I do agree with you.

REV. HOLLOWAY: What I will say is there, I'm not even saying that they should give rides. What I'm saying is we have enough in service where they don't have to drive. We already have Medicare, Medicaid --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right.

REV. HOLLOWAY: Whatever insurance it is, 'cause you know there's so many these days, but they still fall up underneath the guidelines and with Social Security if you brought everybody together, have a come to Jesus moment I like to say; bring everybody to the table and say -- even the nonprofits, bring everybody to the table and say, listen this is what we're giving you. This is the money we gave you. What is going on with the money. Where is it going? How is it benefiting them? And that's how you fill in the gaps because if you have 50 agencies doing the same thing then it's not really helping anybody. There's an old saying that my mother taught me. You can have a piece of the pie and if everybody got piece number nine and nobody got piece one, two, three, four, five then the pie doesn't work. But if you sit down and everybody gets a piece of the pie and say well listen, we would like this agency to do this
and could you do this and could you focus on this? Then you get a whole pie.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Well there's too many agencies, that's the problem. There's too many cooks in the kitchen.

REV. HOLLOWAY: You all gave them the money

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): So, but thank you. And it really should be a local effort as long as --

REV. HOLLOWAY: Yeah, I agree.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): You know, so. And as far as housing I do agree. I live in North Haven so I'll go into New Haven once in a while for Columbus House or the Harkness House and unfortunately there are still homeless Veterans and non-Veterans and it shouldn't be the case. But there is a lot of vacant land and we are trying to do something as far as taking some of the vacant state land or city lane, hopefully state lane, and doing something for our men and women who served us and it should never be the case. You're 100 percent right but unfortunately it is the case sometimes. People fall through the cracks, but we need to do a better job and I just want to thank you, you know for being such a strong advocate and being here. Thank you, Mr. Chair.


REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you, Reverend for being here. You had a lot of great ideas that you mentioned and you're also making me hungry talking about all the -- all the pie.
REV. HOLLOWAY: If you know anything me, I love to cook. (Laughing)

REP. BORER (115TH): So you mentioned about it starts with the municipality and I know that the Commissioner mentioned that we have municipal representations within each city that are trained as to what resources are available and then we also have volunteers that are an extension of that. But we probably an opportunity to do a better job in the housing authorities where many of our Veterans of all ages live and let them know about the resources. I know we do that currently, but we probably could do a little bit more communication to them about what resources are available.

REV. HOLLOWAY: I live in Maryland and I've never seen that, so.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. Made my point. We could do better -- we could do a better job of that I think as a state. I just want to go back to the transportation for Medicaid and Medicare. In 2018 there was a lot of discussion in the news about the state moved from LogistiCare to Veyo. And there was challenges. So I just want to know from you since you're on the ground and you see a lot -- and you're with a lot of members of your community who need that transportation system.

REV. HOLLOWAY: I hate Veyo.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's what I was going to ask. So have you seen any improvement? Because we were told there's improvement but want to hear from folks if there's been improvement.

REV. HOLLOWAY: Okay. This is what I'm going to tell you. I have a daughter with a disability that has a brain injury and had PTSD and we called
and asked for appointments. So I always say that God has a funny sense of humor. When people come tell you stuff he puts you in a predicament where you actually got to call them and find out, does it really work? Well, I stay on the phone 45 minutes to an hour, sometimes two hours waiting for them to answer for someone to tell me if I needed to see a specialty and I live in Meriden and I've got to see Yale Specialty what they'll tell me is that's out of my range. You can't go see them. And then so when I say to them, do you know who I am? They say, no. Well you're getting ready to. Who gives you the authority to tell me that I've got to find a doctor closer because if it was closer I'd have found it already. So who are you to tell me that my daughter can't go to that appointment? Who are you? What rules are you following? What -- what medical do you have to say that? Well we said you can't. I didn't ask you what you said. I asked you on what authority do you have the right to say that? And then I said to them, because she forgets she can't ride by herself. Sometimes you may have a Veteran that needs assistance. Well to get somebody in the car with them for assistance is very hard. We need them to fill out this paper, that paper, this paper. I said wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. I'm not a rocket scientist, I'm not filling out any papers. She can't go by herself so if she goes by herself and gets lost, are you going to look for her? They said, no. I said, well I'll be going with her whether you like it or not.

And what I found was the reason why they couldn't do that and wouldn't do that 'cause it's practical to send me with her so she don't get lost, is because they put other people in the car. So
you've got four people in the car that's going to different places and so they're getting paid like it's a single trip when actually it's not a single trip, it's -- you're sharing the ride. So the state and city -- the state is getting ripped off because they don't know it's a shared ride, but we know. So what you're going to have to do is say to them, listen, you cannot tell -- not only the Veterans, you can't tell people that are going to see a specialty clinic that they can't go 'cause it's out of range. And if you do and they call us, you're going to have a problem with the state because what you've got in place now doesn't work, called Medicaid. You want us to call DSS? Good luck. They don't even answer their phones. And then you're in a pool. So what you did was you tried to make something work and you actually made it worse.

Now I was on the Board of LogistiCare. We could have got them to do actually better. We just didn't do it. So we got Veyo that is supposed to follow the same rules and when they put this in place I asked them, please put in place where each city, state or town, whatever they call them these days, have two representatives and a board where they have to answer not only to the public but you guys also. And you guys didn't do that. So they're getting away with a whole lot of stuff that LogistiCare didn't get away with 'cause I didn't let them, because I represented Meriden.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. Thank you very much for that input. That's helpful and it sounds like we have a little bit more work to do.

REV. HOLLOWAY: Yeah.

REP. BORER (115TH): Around the transportation. Thank you.
REV. HOLLOWAY: You're welcome.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there -- are there any other questions? No? Thank you very much for your testimony.

REV. HOLLOWAY: I want to say thank you for having this meeting and it's a privilege and an honor I want to say to the Veterans to speak up and work for you on your behalf. You've given so much and we owe them so much, so thank this Committee. And I don't remember everybody's names because I have dyslexia so names and numbers don't work for me, but I want to say thank you for looking into this and hopefully we can get better not only as a Committee but as a nation to take care of our Veterans because they take care of us unselfishly, so thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. So we'll move to the public portion of the Public Hearing. And so just a reminder you have three minutes to testify. When you come up please state your name for the record. This is being recorded, so the first person is James Ridley. Your button is already on, so you don't have to push that button.

JAMES RIDLEY: Thank you. Thank you and I'm Coronel James Ridley of the Civil Air Patrol and I would like to thank you for the time here today. Distinguished members of the Committee, I am the Connecticut Wing Commander of the Civil Air Patrol, which is the United States Air Force Auxiliary. Accompanying me today is Retired Major General Jim Skiff, and he's one of our pilots and one of our Operations Officers. We're here today in support of proposed Bill 863, extending certain employment protections to members of the Civil Air Patrol, many of whom are Veterans. With your permission I'd like to read into the record a
prepared statement in that regard, after which I would be pleased to answer any questions.

The Civil Air Patrol is the official auxiliary of the United States Air Force and the fourth component of the Total Force founded in 1941. The nation's first civil defense/homeland security agency it was made a part of the United States Air Force in 1947 as a separate nonprofit civilian organization. The Civil Air Patrol consists of 52 Wings in every state and including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. CAP has approximately 60,000 members, utilizing nearly 600 official aircraft over 4000 volunteer aircraft and more than 1000 vehicles. It is engaged daily in search and rescue, and homeland security and disaster relief. Here in Connecticut we fly Ice Patrol and every winter to guide the Coast Cutters to break up the ice on our rivers and in similar, we provide Long Island Sound Patrol and aid in ships in distress and missing person searches as well as other civilian needs such as after Hurricane Katrina and down -- the recent tornadoes and devastation down in Puerto Rico.

CAP is also a party to numerous memorandums of understanding and agreements of understanding with certain federal and local agencies and police departments in Connecticut. The state Wing of CAP has 12 squadrons, I'm sorry 14 squadrons with approximately 400 Senior Officers and 375 cadets because we have a cadet program. Our active units are located in Middletown, East Granby, Waterbury, Meriden, Stratford, Danbury, Plainville, Torrington, Hartford, East Haven, Danielson, Groton, and New Fairfield.

Under the current Connecticut law, employers may provide their employees with various types of paid
and unpaid leave as part of their overall compensation packages, including vacation time, personal leave and sick leave. Some federal laws such as the Family and Medical Leave Act require covered employers to provide employees with leave in certain situations.

The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 is a Federal law that establishes rights and responsibilities for uniformed Service members and their civilian employers. The law prohibits employers from discharging, discriminating or denying benefits to an employee who undertakes unpaid leave to perform military duties.

Connecticut has passed legislation regarding employee leave recognizing military and national guard duty. The law does not include the Civil Air Patrol members who are called to engage in official Air Force, Department of Homeland Security, or State Emergency Management missions such as those for DEMIS.

Currently the following states include Civil Air Patrol members in their military leave statutes for active duty and training: California, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Washington and Wisconsin.

The proposed statute would add Connecticut to this list of states and recognize the important contributions our volunteer members, many of whom are Veterans of Civil Air Patrol actively engaged in emergency services, homeland security and disaster relief efforts. And with that I'll answer any questions you might have.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Senator Abrams.
SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Good morning, Sir. Thank you so much for being here. I represent Meriden as one of the towns that I represent and I recently had the privilege of being at the MARC Amaraport and attending -- I apologize for not remembering the name exactly but it was the youth group that for Civil Air Patrol and it was very impressive and I thank you for your service and appreciate you being here today. Thank you.

JAMES RIDLEY: Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? Now, have you submitted your written testimony. I just don’t --

JAMES RIDLEY: We have, sir. 25 copies.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay, great. Thank you very much. So that will be put in the record as well, so.

JAMES RIDLEY: Yes, sir.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Thank you very much.

JAMES RIDLEY: Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next is James Skiff.

JAMES RIDLEY: He was with me. (Laughing)

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Oh, you guys were testifying together? (Laughing) Thank you.

JAMES SKIFF: I could say this is one of the best forced multipliers in the state when there is an emergency is found. And I personally responded to Irene, Alfred --

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Do you want to sit and speak and identify so it can just be recorded?
JAMES SKIFF: Certainly.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): You can sit over at --

JAMES SKIFF: No, when I retired I wanted to continue my flying so I got into Civil Air Patrol. What I was saying before this is one of the best force multipliers and the most inexpensive force multipliers because we're all volunteers as personnel but we have some tremendous equipment available for disaster response, search and rescue and we've responded with pictures for every emergency in Connecticut in the last ten years starting with Irene, Alfred, Sandy, the tornadoes this past summer down in Sleepytime Park in Candlewood. We gave all the overhead pictures and reconnaissance and surveys to the DEMIS and that's important for the state if you want Federal reimbursement. And we're paid for the most part by the Federal government so we're kind of a -- like I said, we're not free but we're inexpensive. We're all volunteers but our equipment comes at a price and we have a great nationwide communications network as well. So thank you for your --

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): And would you just state your name for the record? I believe we do have a question, so. I'm sorry, would you say your name for the record?

JAMES SKIFF: Oh, I'm sorry. James Skiff.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Senator Leone.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I apologize as I had to run out for some testimony but I wanted to come back for this particular piece of legislation and I wanted to commend you, Mr. Skiff as well as Coronel Ridley for testifying
on behalf of the Civil Air Patrol of which I'm a big fan of being an Air Force guy. But I know the history of the Civil Air Patrol. They started out as protecting our nation while our troops were off to war and then quickly becoming an auxiliary to Air Force. Your organization does so much that people aren't even aware of what they do. I mean you're right, it does come at a cost and it's really a dollar well spent. And the fact that you do this on a volunteer basis and you have your cadets that come in and become our future leaders I think speaks volume.

I wanted to give you a chance to maybe toot your horn because we were talking earlier. And they do such a stellar job that they are given multiple awards but it's never really publicized. I'm happy to say that we've been able to get all our Senators in the past to be members of the Civil Air Patrol. I know we have new members. We're going to hope to do that as well and we're going to try and get all the other Representatives on board so we look forward to trying to do that so that we can keep this open line of communication open and to have the ability to share what the Civil Air Patrol does. But Colonel if you will, if you just maybe -- I want you to toot your own horn. You -- we were speaking briefly on some of the awards that you've been given. I don't think that was part of your testimony.

JAMES RIDLEY: No, sir it was not.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): But you had mentioned what you've done for the Coast Guard, VFW, the Congressional Awards. Could you just maybe elaborate on them to showcase why it is that what you do with who you are and who you do it with are
so important and appreciative or should be appreciated by the State of Connecticut?

JAMES RIDLEY: Yes, sir. As I said before the Civil Air Patrol has been around 1941 and as you heard, what we did is during World War II we did coastal patrol because the Armed Forces did not have enough airplanes and personnel to do that. We actually are accredited with sinking two German submarines by just dropping grenades out of little planes. We lost two members of Connecticut to that war effort. The first two air medals of World War II were given out to Civil Air Patrol Air Crew Members. In fact, Karl Donitz, Admiral Donitz who was in charge of the German Navy in World War II wrote in his autobiography, we couldn't sink many ships off the Atlantic coast because those damn little yellow airplanes that were flying overhead. And they were all flown by volunteers to this day.

In 911, post 911 the first Wartime Mission was flown by Civil Air Patrol. The pictures over Ground Zero that are attributed to the Air Force really came from Civil Air Patrol aircraft because our planes flew slow enough to get those photographs and those were the ones you saw on TV and such.

Here in Connecticut I'm very proud of our members, all volunteers, all give up their time. Some give up weeks and take vacation time to go support Air Force Missions such as our Reaper Patrol. Last year during the Ice Patrol we were focused -- featured on several different news stations because the Coast Guard and us have a great relationship. We work from a grant from DEMIS to do Long Island Sound Patrol and Ice Patrol in the winter. And as you recall, last year the ice was
pretty formidable on the riverways in Connecticut so we were called upon by the Coast Guard to go up, fly our entire route, video tape, photograph and send to directly their cutter so they can brake that ice up. Well last year in -- in October we were honored when the Coast Guard showed up and they gave us a citation for -- for Homeland Security and Community Service for Outstanding Support LISP and the Ice Patrol for what we did enabling them to be able to cut the ice where needed and direct them. That's just one of our missions, search and rescue.

I was joking, I think I might have told Senator Leone this. I was out on Memorial Day and we were -- I was test driving a '66 Mustang and I got a call from the Coast Guard. And if you recall, near Ledge Light in New London there were two youth who took a boat and they disappeared out into the Sound and they asked us if we could get an airplane up there. As we were flying, we had two aircraft. We had one routing the support of the state police and the search on the ground, I was looking at the title charts for the night before so I asked one of my aircraft to go over to Long Island, just go over the coastline and sure enough we found the boat overturned that they took. Unfortunately both of them expired, but we have -- we're credited with our cell phone forensics of saving I believe was 292 lives with Search and Rescue as well as cell phone forensics. We're called upon all the time. I've recently had a mission last year which developed into a MOU with Middletown Police Department where we were looking for a person who committed suicide off the Arrigonzi Bridge and they asked us to help out with that.
So when the VFW came and also gave us an award. I got a call from Greg Smith, former State Commander who said our members are getting older and he asked me if I was a member of the VFW and I said I am. I'm out of the Newtown post and I told him that, what can I do for you? And he says, well we just don't have enough people to put the flags on the graves on Memorial Day plus we have hospitalized Veterans that come in for events and we'd love to have your kids do Color Guards. We've been supporting them for the last five years and they came and gave us a plaque for all our efforts. And I just go an email two days ago asking me for another support, I think it's May 5th, they're going to busing some Veterans down to, I think Milford and they want our kids to go down and perform a Color Guard and sit down and talk with them. So our youth get to experience what our Veterans do for us. They become the future leaders as Senator Leone said. Many of them go on to service in -- in the military, some don't. They just go on to other areas including politics. It's up to them.

I just got back after spending a week in Washington D.C. lobbying on behalf of the Air Force budget where we get most of our money, a very small piece, to support our efforts. So I was meeting with our Senators and our congressional leaders down there. It's an invaluable thing we do and we do so much in Connecticut. The water main brake in Danbury not too long ago? The unit in Danbury and the cadets went out there to hand water out to people so they could bathe, drink. No other organization other than the fire department showed up and the Mayor of Danbury called it in and gave them a citation for it.
We have a proud history. We're about 900 strong in this Wing and we're one of the most active in the United States. I was told when we were down by the National Commander that Connecticut came in third in the number of Air Force -- air craft hours of utilization in the entire nation and when you've got states like Texas, California that fly year round in warm weather, to come in number three, I'm very proud of our guys, and we have -- and women. We have nine aircrafts and we fly the heck out of it. And our kids work very hard to support their community, state and nation, which is our purpose.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Coronel. I appreciate you shedding some light on some of those things that I know but maybe not other members know and that's --

JAMES RIDLEY: I promise to get more information out in the newsletters.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you. And if everyone becomes a member, which I'm sure the Coronel will make sure you can become one if you so desire, you'll get their magazine where you can see this on an ongoing basis, what they do. And the fact that they do search and rescue, they do aerial reconnaissance in -- in support of not just law enforcement but other military branches and out state. It's the reason why this Bill is here so that they can be afforded the same protections to continue that service. And I'll just close by saying that the fact that we have young kids willing to learn how to fly, be part of an organization that builds discipline and commitment and loyalty and integrity, all those great things that we strive to teach everyone, they're learning it by doing it. So we should continue to allow
that to happen. So I just wanted to offer my measure of support. And thank you for what you and this organization do.

JAMES RIDLEY: Thank you, my pleasure. Thank you, my pleasure. Just to add two more things. One of the things too that we have established, when there is a tragedy like the tornadoes last year, members of our legislative squadron, which Senator Leone heads, you can ask me say listen, my area got devastated. Can you take me up in one of the CAP aircrafts so I can see it from the air? Absolutely. We did it last year for a couple of Representatives. We're also working and Connecticut is leading the way, so Air Patrol is leading the way on two partnerships. One will become a reality very soon with the NFL Alumni Association who will send former players to talk to our kids about leadership and physical fitness. The other one is just getting started right now is with LEADS, the Law Enforcements Against Drugs. And they are -- and when we do this, they're going to come into our communities. They have a great program that is proven to keep youth away from drugs and also cyber bullying. And we're going to work with that so they're not -- so we get certified, they can come in and talk to our cadets and we can go out and talk to schools and I am actually looking at building another school squadron in communities such as Bridgeport, at the Bridgeport Military Academy to bring this program to kids that don't have that advantage, to help them get the leadership, get the community service and hopefully better their lives.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you and thank you, Mr. Chairman.
SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? Thank you very much for your testimony. We appreciate it.

JAMES RIDLEY: Thank you very much for time.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Is Senator Lesser available? We'll go back to the elected officials and Senator Lesser is next.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With the Committee's permission I'd like to call two members -- two folks, David Roane, Commander of American Legion Post 206, and Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta to share my time. Is that something we could do?

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Yes.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Terrific. Thank you, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, members of the Veteran's Committee. I'm here to testify in support of Senate Bill 949, AN ACT AUTHORIZING BONDS OF THE STATE FOR THE HARRY RUFFIN, JR. AMERICAN LEGION POST 206. For the record, I'm State Senator Matt Lesser and I do want to give a special shout out to my co-Senator from Middletown, Senator Mary Abrams who has really been instrumental in pushing this Bill forward. And with that, I would love to yield my time to -- to Mr. Roane and to Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you and if you just state your name before you start your -- your speech for the record. Thank you Commander Roane.

COMMANDER ROANE: Good morning my name is David Roane. I'm the Commander of Harry Ruffin, Jr. American Legion Post 206 in Middletown. I'm also the Chairperson of 206 Incorporation, which came out of Harry Ruffin, Jr. American Legion Post.
Before I go on I would like to take the opportunity to thank you and the entire Veterans Affairs Committee for allowing us to appear before you today.

Military services foster a sense of camaraderie and trust between service members that usually continue -- that continues after the military services is completed. Veterans are also highly motivated to help a brother or sister in arms and to go above and beyond to assist because of this bond.

The veterans who are providing help gain a sense of satisfaction and the knowledge that they have made a difference. The Veteran who receives the assistance also benefits. Another Veteran better understands what a Veteran is going through.

One of the biggest benefits of Veterans Helping Veterans is a better understanding of what the Veteran is going through, whether it is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), financial difficulties due to service-related energy -- injuries, or problems obtaining the benefits that Veterans are entitled too. Someone who has been there and done that has a level of personal experience and empathy that cannot be taught or faked.

Our Veterans return home with a wide variety of issues from mental health disorders, physical disabilities, traumatic brain injuries and so on. Combat Veterans also face many challenges in transitioning back into civilian life and this causes additional stress. Veterans Helping Veterans can help other Vets in many ways both big and small. Sometimes just having a sympathetic ear and someone to listen to who truly understands his or her needs. Some Veterans may need
transportation for treatment appointments. Others may need a referrals for counseling or substance abuse disorder.

In Middletown there are many men and women Veterans and their families in need of medical treatment, substance abuse, PTSD counseling and a host of other problems. They may need food, shelter, or even suicide intervention, etc. Our proposed Veterans facility and Conference Center will provide a one-stop recourse for any needs that a veteran may have.

In addition, your investment today will allow us independence to the development of a conference center. Therefore, we will not need to come back yearly looking for additional funds. This is because all the revenue generated will go back into operations and new programs for our Veterans and their families. Thank you. I'll be glad to answer any questions after the Councilwoman speaks.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you.

COUNCILWOMAN BARTOLOTTA: Good morning. Thank you. I'll state my name for the record. So I'm Councilwoman Mary Bartolotta. I've been asked to read the Mission Statement for the -- for the project. The Veterans Helping Veterans is a series of programs designed for successful reintegration of Veterans into home and communities. 206 Inc and American Legion Post 206 has a goal to establish a state of the art Veterans facility in the order to sustain programming for Veterans by Veterans. 25 Industrial Park Road property will allow 206 Inc., Harry Ruffin, Jr, American Legion Post 206 to provide a multi-facet approach to enhancing a Veteran's life in the Middlesex community such as
it all begins in a conference facility. The plan is to build a conference rental and event planning brand that will become the number one choice for both individual clients, corporate clients in Middlesex County.

Our vision reflects the values, integrity and service in excellent, a teamwork on Veterans focuses on hiring and training Veterans. American Legion networking of programs began with a state of the art gathering place with Wi-Fi accessibility at all times, computer access. This facility includes private conference rooms. A Veteran community unique education research center. Veterans business incumbent to state business support -- providing support to start up your business. We'll provide office and management assistance funding through grants and conference facility. The plan is to support Veterans small business development by providing no rent to -- nominal -- or nominal rent for space. Our goal is to generate success. We will work closely with HD -- HEDCO, Inc. using their model, inspiration and guidance since 1975. Has helped clients in their communities improve and achieve and succeed by supporting their growth and progress. We will build productive partnerships, create new programs that meet the changing needs of the entrepreneurs and increase the funds available to help people build -- Veterans build, and improve their businesses and nonprofit organizations.

We have the satisfaction of seeing people transform an idea, a dream or passion to a thriving business. Raising Hope is a national community outreach program for mothers raising their sons alone. This program is developed by Roy T. Edwards, Founder of the Roy T. Edwards
group. Roy is an educator, author, trans -- formal speaker, coach and Veteran. He has worked relentlessly over the last 30 years and in multiple leadership positions in the education and community development, corporate business and nonprofit organizations. In addition to his civic involvement, Roy has taught at the college level as well as K through 12 public and private and has dedicated to this -- is dedicated to this project.

We will have satellite offices made available for services and for all Veteran programs. Boots to Teaching careers for American Legion programs that trains and inspires Veterans to become teachers. Parents and children learning together after school programming educational creative designed. You Fit Education. This organization will be space and work with our Veterans and their families as well as the community at large. ROTC programming on site. No need to taking -- taking up school property, they wanted me to throw in there. Creating another facility for Veterans organizing to meet. Currently across the street from 25 Industrial Park Drive is a National Guard Unit and Army Reserve Unit. This -- at this time in Middletown there are 15 Veteran group meetings.

Employment opportunity for Veterans, Veterans and families and youth. Veterans and Veteran family counselling support services. Veterans Helping Veterans will continue with research to provide up-to-date support for new and old concerns identified by Veterans and their families. This includes housing the issues of homelessness. We will begin by offering a warming station.

I also just wanted for the record, the area that this building and services for the Legion we'd be occupying is in the Westfield District of the City
of Middletown. And Jennifer Marr, which is the Chair of that association asked me if I could submit this for the record. The Westfield Resident Association supports the effort of Harry Ruffin, Jr. American Legion Post to build a space for Veterans programming, small business incubator space so conventions can be in the center of Middletown. Post 206 will be the welcome addition to the Westfield section of Middletown bringing new life to a vacant building, vital services for Veterans and Middletown and the greater Hartford region. Post 206 has long been without a home and this funding for a physical location will enable it to greatly expand the services it can provide. Most importantly the chosen location is directly across the street from the Army Reserve training base, which provides a natural partnership between Veterans and Post 206. There could not be a better place for a better project. I would also like you to know that Jennifer is a Veteran herself.

As a Councilwoman for the city of Middletown and a sister, niece and family member of Veterans, I speak from the heart to say to you that experiencing and watching my brother go through PTSD and undiagnosed for many years and being self-medicated, violence in the home, homelessness, lack of employment, lack of services of medical; my brother served several tours in Vietnam, unfortunately lost the left side of his lung, had shrapnel in his body, Agent Orange yet he dealt with for many years and what that does to the human body. He passed away March 3, three years ago. (Crying) Excuse me. I know that these services are needed. I know to the point of many speakers today that we need it at a level that is going to connect to where they're
residing, and sometimes residing means where they're homeless. And I believe this program that Post 206 will be the program to help our Middlesex County area to be actively reaching out and helping those Veterans get the services they need. I can tell you that I think the Veteran services through the state and Federal government have all the best intentions, but I can tell you as somebody who is a very persistent person and does not give up easily, it took me months, months just to get one type of service for my brother, months. When he passed away it took a year just to get the $900 to help with funeral costs. We need to do something at the local level.

I will also be presenting a resolution to the City of Middletown's counsel to support this project for $260,000 because I believe it in that much and I believe that we need to do this. I'm going to yield the floor to the --


SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Thank you so much for being here today. Thank you for this project. I was going to ask Councilwoman Bartolotta, like what -- where do you feel the city is in terms of their support of this project and their -- and their feelings about what it might add to the city?

COUNCILWOMAN BARTOLOTTA: So I'll start with that I have reached out to several of my colleagues. I do have the other -- I'm a Democrat. I have the other side of the aisle, Republic Representatives that are signing the resolution with me and several support. The votes are there for this to move -- to move forward. What I can say is that most of us that I -- that I'm -- I would say a
majority of us believe in this project and the reason I would articulate it that way is that I have not had any individual conversation with each and every Councilperson, but reaching out to the community as a whole, Jennifer Marr that I read into record -- her words this morning, represents a large area of our city and they're excited to have this and to have the building occupied by Lesion, and for the services to be there. I will be meeting with the north end action team, St. Vincent DePaul. I'm hoping that we can bring everybody into the conversation. I see nothing but a positive.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): As you know, money is tight at the state.

COUNCILWOMAN BARTOLOTTA: Yeah.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): The Governor has talked about us being on a bonding diet, so can you talk to me a little bit about who -- whoever would like to answer this, why this project should be considered under those circumstances?

COUNCILWOMAN BARTOLOTTA: Well I would quickly say, we need to learn to diet somewhere else and not on the backs of our Veterans. They need the services, they need to have these services so their families can have a successful healthy life; and without these services that is not happening. And the more productive Veteran you have, the healthier Veteran you have, the more productive society you have and they'll be contributing in a positive way instead of in a negative.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): I would -- you don't have to go anywhere. The microphone moves. You don't have to. The only thing I would add to that. I agree with everything with Councilwoman Bartolotta
said, the only thing I would add is that Governor Lamont in talking about the diet has talked about prioritizing economic development projects and this Bill is exactly that, right? So one of the things that it does is it has a business incubator program for Veteran-owned businesses that could be really important for the economy and the Conference Center as well that would also support a Veterans program, is exactly aligned with what the Governor is talking about that diet. But certainly I understand that funds are constrained and that's why it's important to see -- to see that Middletown is willing to step up and do its part as well to support the financial operation of this Bill.

COMMANDER ROANE: We've had -- we've had a lot of discussion both in our Corporation and our Posts and bonding. The reason why we came this route and we started last year. We've been doing this almost a year and a half now, is because if we -- if we went another route we would fail even as Veterans, we would fail because the mortgage payments that we would have to make and other indebtedness that we would go into, we would just fail. We don't have 1,000 members where we can go get money. There's overhead. There's other expenses in a lot of the programs that we run and so this is the best route. Look at it this way. It's an investment for the State of Connecticut and I've been asked a number of times as American Legion member and the Corporation, when are you going to be coming back to us? We give you some today, you're going to be coming back tomorrow asking for more money. The reason -- and we tell them and we know it for a fact that we will not be because the Conference Center will bring in money to sustain us, and all that money won't have to be
going into a mortgage, taking away from the Veterans the Veterans need help. A lot of things that was said here today, we would be able to do and we intend to do as you see. And we'll have the money -- have the money to do it. The transportation we've already had a group come to us and say, would you take this over? We say if we have this Bill then we will. They talked about -- the Coronel talked about the Civil Air Patrol. We reached out to the Civil Air Patrol, our American Legion Post, we honored one of his students, a 12-year-old who has already got her flying lessons done, etc. They called about hooking up with the NFL, well Mr. Rorey, he's with the NFL. He's -- we're already hooking up with them and the only reason why it hasn't started because we do not have the facility to do the things that need to be done for Veterans and our main emphasis is not just the Veterans but the Veteran and the Veteran's family. We often and I as a Veteran, thank you for serving and I appreciate that. I never hear people saying that to Veteran's families. You know they're left aside. We need this facility so we can take care not part of the family but the whole family. Because that Veteran's family while he or she was out to war or fighting for us, defending this country, they was going through almost the same kind of emotional stress except for bullets flying past them. That's the only difference but the wife was back home with the children trying to survive. So you need to take care of the whole family and that's what we need to do.

And in Middletown particularly there's a lot of -- there are other Veterans organizations but they all -- they don't have any other place to go. If something comes up and they can't use a facility,
now they're going to have the facility to do that, so that -- that's why we're going -- the main reason why we're going the bonding route.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Thank you very much and I also want to acknowledge all of the other people from 206 that came with you today and their families and the supporters of this project, so thank you all very much for being here. Appreciate it. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

COMMANDER ROANE: And we have people from the State American Legion and National American Legion right behind us here that would like to say something in support of what we're trying to do.


REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Barely.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So is it my understanding that there's a quest to bond up to $2.7 million; is that correct Senator Lesser?

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Yes. I believe, that's my understanding.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. And is there a -- is it part of that would be to buy the 25 Industrial Park Road Property?

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Correct.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Which I see is listed for $3.5 million. Is there some negotiation where that price would be --

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): It's hard -- yeah, I don't know if we can get into real estate negotiations in this hearing.
REP. VAIL (52ND): Yes, yes, I know. That's part of the, you know just because it's listed for that, that doesn't mean that that's what you'll be paying for the property.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): Right. I would also just emphasize that we're going to state asking for the state to pick up the whole portion of this. We're asking a combination of private funding, local funding and state funding to provide this regional benefit.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So it's an overall project so obviously it would benefit people outside of Middletown as well. Is there a project number, cost, final cost number and how much are the City of Middletown or any other things going to be contributing to the project?

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): So I think Councilwoman Bartolotta said that she anticipates that the City of Middletown would be kicking in the 10 percent of what we're asking the state to do so that's $260,000 I think was mentioned?

COUNCILWOMAN BARTOLOTTA: Correct.

SENATOR LESSER (9TH): And then -- and then overall costs I would turn over to Commander Roane.

COMMANDER ROANE: Yes, we have negotiations with other organizations and again on nonprofit, on not a loan basis and they're just waiting to see if -- if we get the building, if we're able to get the money from the Bonding Commission so that we can buy the building. For instance, we have the manager of construction expert with us today and we've estimated that the renovation to -- to do the things that we need to do inside the building would cost us around $850 -- $850,000. We already
have and know where we can get that money without borrowing it.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay, so --

COMMANDER ROANE: We have negotiated with people to get that money to -- without borrowing it.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay, so basically this bond would be specifically for the purchase of the 25 Industrial Park Road --

COMMANDER ROANE: Yes.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Which up to 200 -- $2.7 million --

COMMANDER ROANE: Yes.

REP. VAIL (52ND): In bonding from the state and 10 percent, so $270,000 from the City of Middletown thereabouts. Is that a pretty accurate?

COMMANDER ROANE: Yeah. And --

REP. VAIL (52ND): And then after that if you were to purchase that, you said that you could acquire $850 million to update that facility to do the things you --

COMMANDER ROANE: Not million, $850,000.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Yeah, $800 -- well you said $850 so we'll meet in the middle, $850,000. (Laughing) But is that -- is that where -- is that basic -- basically what we're looking at here?

COMMANDER ROANE: Yes, sir. Yep.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. Thank you.
COMMANDER ROANE: And when you mentioned the -- the 3.5, that is what it's on the market for but I have personally met with the owners and when they found out who we were, the owner dropped the price down to --

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay.

COMMANDER ROANE: And we know for a fact that anybody else would not -- he's hold -- trying to hold the building as long as he can for us to get this money and he's willing to give it to us at that price.

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

COMMANDER ROANE: The location.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? Representative Phipps. Just speak very briefly.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Good afternoon everyone, Chairs and the entire Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity. I've come in full support of this Bill. This Legion has supported our community in numerous ways; their voluntarism effort, their support for their fellow Veterans, their support for racial justice, social justice, economic justice has been unquestionable for years. And especially after taking the quick tour with the National Guard last week and recognizing the amount of service that goes into serving our country in the way that they have -- they have done.

But more, I would say just as important, I have spoken with Commander Roane about his own service and the injustice that he saw in order to help serve our country and knowing that story was very similar to many of the folks that are to my right.
I think it's long overdue to invest back into their community the way that they have invested in our community. So once again I would like to just say that I'm in full support of this Bill with my Senator and I think it's also -- you can see that we both have state support along with municipal support and you can see the great community support that you have also. So I appreciate the time and once again, I am in full support of this Bill.


RANDY COLLINS: Good afternoon. My name is Randy Collins. I'm Advocacy Manager for the Connecticut Conference and Municipalities. CCM represents -- currently represents 168 of 169 towns and cities, over 99 percent of our population. I'm here today to testify in opposition to Senate -- House Bill 1744, AN ACT CONCERNING PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS FOR VETERANS HAVING DISABILITY RATINGS. 7244 would increase the currently -- would expand a current unfunded mandate the towns and cities -- that our towns and cities provide. As we know our towns and cities rely exclusively on the property tax to fund education, police, fire, road maintenance and being forced to rely on this property tax it is currently been eviscerated by almost 77 existing property tax exemptions. New Haven right now has almost 55 percent of the property tax base except. Hartford, New London almost 50 percent and the number keeps on growing. It's time CCM discontinued -- argue that it is time at some point that we need to look at what is a regressive -- a regressive property tax system we can no longer afford. We're looking at new state deficits. We can no longer afford to continue to provide property tax exemptions for
some at the -- at the expense of others because that's all that this simply does; is it shifts that burden from one person. Somebody else has to pick up that slack. We never looked at means testing any of these just because you know, exemptions exist, doesn't mean that the person who is the recipient doesn't have the ability to pay. And politically that's going to be a hard conversation be it a Veteran, a senior. But we have limited means and resources in our towns and cities and at some point we have to start making some of these hard decisions to say we can't continue expand, you know, you have the property tax but we're going to continue to limit how you can use that. And I'm happy to take any questions.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Does anyone have any questions? All right. I guess not. Thank you very much. Next Steve Kennedy.

STEVE KENNEDY: Distinguished members of the Committee on Veteran's Affairs, my name is Steve Kennedy. I am Connecticut team leader for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. I'm joined by my colleagues here from the Veteran's Legal Services Clinic at Yale Law School who work with us on a number of Veterans initiatives over the last couple of years and are now working with us as well on this one. You're going to receive written testimony from us on a number of Bills. Today I want to focus on HB 7135.

We're in support of this proposal. We appreciate the Committee bringing it forward. My understanding is that this is basically bringing back Senate Bill 225 from last session that was meant to waive the registration fees for Veterans entering the medical marijuana program. Again, my
understanding from last year is that there were concerns over how many Veterans are using the program and that the intention of adding the option for Veterans to self-identify. We appreciate that the Committee recognizes that this is an important issue access to cannabis for Veterans for important. We would urge you to enter substitute language into this Bill to basically bring back the original intent of the Bill.

I had -- I had prepared something that I was going to give and I am just -- I'm just basically going to go to the need for this Bill any kind of practical questions can go either -- it's laid out in more detail in our written testimony and my colleagues here can answer questions on how this can be implemented. I'm really hoping just to convey the immediacy of our concern here. I -- this is a personal issue for me. I just found out that I lost another of my brothers to suicide today. It's the -- this issue is raw. It's urgent and anything that we can do to provide support I think that we need to do and that's -- that's something that we always fought for up here in Hartford and this Committee has always supported us. And I understand that there are -- you know we are in a tight fiscal situation here but medical marijuana has been shown to have therapeutic value for a significant number of Veterans treating PTSD, chronic pain, and the -- we have the research kind of documenting that attached to our written testimony. The issue really is just getting them into the program. What we hear again and again, I mean I've talked to people across the state; this is an issue that comes up often, is that Veterans want to use the program, they're unable to afford it. Current VA
policy prohibits VA physicians from actually writing a certification for Veterans to enter the program. They're actually prohibited from even discussing it as an option that they could pursue somewhere else. They're only able to talk about how it may interact with some other treatments that they're receiving at the VA. So for a Veteran to actually enter the program, they need to go out, hire a separate doctor for you know, potentially several hundred dollars to have a consultation, get a certification written and then go through the regular process that everyone does and has to pay for the registration and pay to maintain that each year. So the intent behind the fee waiver to not even really give a benefit to the Veteran, but just to make up for the Federal VA's policy and their failure to address this issue. This is something that this state has done in several instances including last year when we passed Senate Bill 284. We see that the Federal VA is not taking care of Veterans with honorable discharges. The state stepped in and did something about it. Other states are doing the same thing with this issue. There are several states that do offer fee waivers or other means of facilitating access to their medical marijuana programs to Veterans.

So again, you know I recognize that we're in a tight fiscal situation in the state. When it comes to issues that could prevent Veteran suicides, could prevent Veterans from falling into addiction to opioids or homelessness, I really have no patience for that kind of a question when we're talking about peanuts really. I mean the rate of Connecticut citizens using the program is about 0.9 percent. I don't see a reason why Veterans should be hugely greater proportion of
using the program. We're talking about something like 2,000 Veterans waiving a $100 a year for them. You heard from Councilwoman Bartolotto the impact this can have on not just on Veterans. We have families, we have neighbors. Their impacts here across our communities, across our state. I'm not an actuary. I can't put a dollar sign on that but I can -- I don't how -- I don't know what the -- I also don't know what the impact of losing a 29-year-old like my friend who could be living in this state, contributing to our economy, building his community in the same that I am and the same way that all of my brothers and sisters are here. That's -- there's an emotional cost there. There's a financial cost there and I'm damn sure it's more than $100 a year. So I would again urge you to look at substituting language into this Bill so rather than continuing -- to try and study how much this is going to cost, look at what the -- what the cost is already essentially. Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much for your testimony on this and I look forward to seeing your written testimony on the other Bill. I know we have been corresponding on some of those other Bills. I believe Representative Vail has a question for you.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon. In this Bill -- I read this Bill, I know you mentioned substitute language but the way this Bill reads this would only apply to palliative care unless I'm reading it wrong. Is that your understanding as well?

STEVE KENNEDY: Yes.
REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. And you're talking more of a PTSD I would assume when referring to what you think it should be covering.

STEVE KENNEDY: Well my --

REP. VAIL (52ND): I mean you mentioned you know, suicide and --

STEVE KENNEDY: Yeah, well my under -- my understanding is that this is for entrance into the medical marijuana just in general for any of the qualifying conditions that are listed. Is that incorrect?

REP. VAIL (52ND): What I'm reading here, unless I'm reading it wrong refers to palliative care, which would mean you know people that have less than 13 months to live, so.

STEVE KENNEDY: So this -- I do this Bill doesn't address the -- that issue, so the Bill from last year, Senate Bill 225 was essentially -- this looks like to me two Bills are kind of put together. There's the palliative care issue and then there is the one that allows Veterans entering the program to self-identify. Last year there was basically an identical Bill that had the palliative care issue and then a separate section that would waive fees for Veterans and we're asking that you basically use -- substitute the language from last year into this Bill. So replace the current Veterans option that's in this Bill and use the one from last session.

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

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Representative Ferraro then Representative Napoli.
REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you for your testimony. Certainly was compelling in many ways. The point made by Representative Vail is an important point in that it doesn't -- the Bill as written does not address the situations that you were addressing and if we go back to Senate Bill, what was it last year, 225?

STEVE KENNEDY: 225, yes.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): That Bill in your estimation, because I don't recall it, does cover the situations that you were discussing?

STEVE KENNEDY: Yes, yes. So again, it was basically the same two issues put together as what you have here except instead of Veterans identifying themselves they would just have a fee waiver.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Okay. And of course the concern I guess on this Bill is to study -- to study the fiscal note connected to it and based on your numbers it sounds like $20,000 is a reasonable number, $100 times 2,000, correct?

STEVE KENNEDY: So this -- you know this would be real -- this is really a -- just taking the rate of --

REP. FERRARO (117TH): $200,000, excuse me.

STEVE KENNEDY: Yeah, $200,000. Just taking the rate of people using in the state, you know not making any adjustment for Veterans using it less or more. Yeah, we're talking about that would be just about $200,000.

REP. VAIL (52ND): $200,000, yes.
STEVE KENNEDY: And again, you know this is something that we have other Bills like this where you know we waive fees. You know the Connecticut, you know state colleges and university system absorb the cost of the tuition waiver. I don't think it's unreasonable to expect DCP to do the same in this case.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And your point regarding the cost to the community, community cost certainly is important to consider but I think you understand you now, I think everybody here feels what you're saying and can probably agree with you that it's something that's worthwhile and what have you, but you can understand with the fiscal constraints the state is feeling why it would be important to get a handle on exactly the cost that's going to -- that's being asked for this. So whether we can implement this immediately without the study, I'm not sure that a Committee can go that way.

STEVE KENNEDY: I mean -- sorry.

REP. VAIL (52ND): I'm sorry, I would have to defer to the leadership and -- but I'm pretty sure we're all anxious to be able to find a solution for the Veterans that you identified with your story.

STEVE KENNEDY: I think that is absolutely a fair concern to say -- you know if every Veteran in the state used this you're talking about a huge cost. I think that there are other ways that we could make that estimation. We're happy to assist in that. We did the same thing with SB 284 last year and we're happy to assist in any way that we can. I think that you know, we kind of had the same discussion two years ago before SB 284. At some point you're potentially spending more studying this than you would to actually administer it in
the first place. We do have free resources where people are willing to volunteer to do this with extensive experience in making these kind of estimates so we would be happy to do that.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And depending on how the negotiations go for the legalization of recreation marijuana, maybe some of that expense can diverted to this -- this this cost.

STEVE KENNEDY: Yes, that is -- that is something that we are actively pursuing as well. I mean we -- so this isn't -- again this is a major issue for our membership and we're exploring all options to make sure that Veterans are able to get access and that could include legalizing recreational marijuana and using the funds from the taxation to actually support subsidies for Veterans or low-income people or things like that. Whatever it takes for the Veterans that I serve to get the treatment that they need, we will pursue.

REP. VAIL (52ND): All right. Thank you very much for your testimony and thank you, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Representative Napoli and then Senator Berthel.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you very much for being here. I'm very sorry for your loss. How many other states participate in the waiver program?

STEVE KENNEDY: Sam?

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Just curious.

MR. FRIZELL: We don't have an exact number on that, Representative but Massachusetts and Oregon that have notable fee waivers.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay.
MR. FRIZELL: Massachusetts have a complete fee waiver and Oregon has a dramatic fee reduction.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay. And do you know if those states use any innovative ways to pay for it maybe through philanthropy or is it just a subsidy?

STEVE KENNEDY: I mean those are our two states that have legalized recreational marijuana so I would imagine that it might be some of the same thing that -- like Representative Ferraro just mentioned so I think that's possible but I don't know if that's right.

MR. FRIZELL: We would be happy to look into that question for your, Representative but as -- as far as we know, Mr. Kennedy is correct. They subsidize those programs through --

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): That makes sense. Thank you, I appreciate it.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Senator Berthel.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Kennedy, thank you for being here and thank you for your service and I'm also very sorry for your loss today.

STEVE KENNEDY: Thank you.

SENATOR BERTHEL (32ND): You know I've had a couple of prior conversations with you and with the people that support your -- the group that you represent, the group of Veterans that you represent. The one thing and maybe I'll look at them when I'm talking to you or visa versa, but I don't recall if -- if I had asked in any of our prior conversations if there is some -- some good experience in other states where -- not
necessarily where the legislation has passed or we found a way to get this legislation passed, but where there's actually in use medical marijuana for Veterans that are suffering from the various ailments that the marijuana would address. Are there other states where there -- this is in practice already and if there -- if there are, can you provide to the Committee some of the good outcomes that have come from that so we can look at this as not just a -- not just an opportunity to expand the medical marijuana program because we -- we maybe feel it's a good thing to do, it's the right thing to do but there's some good evidence. There's some science that would support that. So I don't know if you guys can address that for me or not.

STEVE KENNEDY: And I would jump in just real quick before they do that and say, I mean that that is happening in now in Connecticut. I mean there are several conditions recognized by our own medical marijuana that are prevalent among Veterans and Veterans are using them. Our issue is just that there are -- there other Veterans who are unable to access the program because of the costs but I'll let them -- I'll let them expand on some other states.

MS. BROOMS: Yes, absolutely. He's absolutely right. There are several conditions that are frequently Veteran service connected that Connecticut's program already covers. One condition that I know is under consideration this session, is adding chronic pain to the list. That is huge among Veterans. Adding chronic pain would go a long way.

In terms of other states, states definitely do offer fee waiver to Veterans. Another low-cost
option that states often take is extending the certification period. So you have two sort of main cost bumps that Veterans run into. So the first is that initial certification where they're having trouble even finding a doctor in the first place to get them to entry into the program.

The second though is that there are often recertification fees which is sort of what this Bill addresses already, where every year you have to pay an additional fee. And two states that we're aware of so far waive recertification for Veterans. So Oregon for example, a lot of Veterans just get certified once and then it allows them to continue using that same certification for as long as they use the medical marijuana program. Illinois has an even better option where Veterans don't have to get certification for the exact reasons that Steve described. Veterans have a tremendous difficulty getting certification because the VA prevents their physicians from signing any sort of paperwork so in Illinois Veterans simply need to provide their DD214, which is their service record and some sort of diagnosis to a dispensary directly and then it waives the requirement for any sort of physician certification.

So to answer you question Representative Napoli, there are a few different innovative things that different states are doing and we would be happy to provide additional research to the Committee on that.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay. Thank you. And that was what we had discussed when -- when we met with respect to this; you know to do exact -- try to do exactly what you just described in terms of what's going on. So -- and I don't recall if I'd asked
if there was actually evidence in other states for thank you for providing that. You know, and I think that you know when we look at -- we look at all the fiscal obstacles that we're up against right now in this particular cycle in Connecticut that we're not talking about -- you know we're not talking $2.7 million in bonding for the folks that spoke before you with that great project in Middletown. We're talking about a very, I think ultimately a very small number and we may be -- may be providing a very useful and helpful resource to Veterans that need this. So thank you, thank you for the additional information. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

STEVE KENNEDY: If I could add thing just on top of what Megan had mentioned. Along the lines of what it normally does. We do have a mechanism potentially for that in the state so not -- rather than even presenting a DD214 just last year for Senate Bill 284 we do have a state form that the DVA administers that allows ministers to get a certification of a diagnosis of PTSD, injury, military sexual trauma. If we did work on something like this, I would think the DVA could add other conditions that qualify for the medical marijuana program to that form at no cost essentially.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Great, thank you. I appreciate the additional detail there. Thanks a lot.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Are there any other questions? No? Thank you very much for your testimony today.

STEVE KENNEDY: If I could add one more thing.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Sure.
STEVE KENNEDY: So the one thing, this was myriad in testimony but for -- really for all of the Bills that are before you today and from the previous hearing, one thing that we would request the Committee take into consideration is the language used in defining a Veteran. So as Public Act 18-47 which you know I had been referencing as Senate Bill 284 from last year, giving the expanded state Veterans benefits to Veterans with other than honorable discharges and a diagnosis of a qualifying condition. The way that that language worked for that Bill, it changed all, basically all of the previous state Veterans benefits. Definition of a Veteran to reference that qualifying condition to make sure that the Veterans that we covered last year are covered in any new Bills going forward.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Thank you very much.

STEVE KENNEDY: Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next Dan Thurston.

DAN THURSTON: Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, and members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee. Morning, or good afternoon actually. I'm Dan Thurston and I'm the Chairman for the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition. There's been a lot of good testimony given here and I'm trying to figure out how to summarize a lot of thoughts in three minutes. But the -- like one item here that we are opposing Bill 7137 and backing the Commissioner Saadi's reasoning for opposing this Bill. I'm familiar with the VSOs and their operation. They have a mission at their tasked in that they serve the state very, very well and I would not want to see that mission compromised. The implementation of this Bill
would take away from that and take them away from their normal duties and I think that would not be appropriate.

In conjunction with that the -- thinking about you know the whole package here, Bill 7134 would provide public transportation. We're looking at -- looking at a transportation issue on both -- and by providing access to public transportation to Veterans free would help for those that are in the demographic area where bus transportation and public transportation are available. Outside of that, I've helped a number of my friends with appointments to the VA and other doctors. Some of them drive, but on the other hand, some of the treatment when they leave the facilities, they're not recommended to -- to drive so you drive up and down there. It will take half a day for me, from the northwest corner of the state to go down to the VA you know while they have their procedures and then get them home. So there is a significant amount of dedication and time that needs to be put into this and again, putting it back on the Department of Veterans Affairs I don't think would be a proper move. But the Veterans Service Organization such as the Disabled American Veterans, the DAV have vehicles that they provide they services for Veterans. Unfortunately the drivers are not always available. Part of it is an aging problem. They had sufficient drivers a number of years ago but that has changed because the drivers are getting old -- older. They can't always make it out so vans will sit vacant and unavailable to help our Veterans. Focusing on trying to reconstitute the pool of available drivers would be very beneficial and also other organizations as we talked about, do have those services available. The question is making a
number of -- getting enough drivers to handle the workload.

We'll be honest with this. At the last Public Hearing I touched on the issue of helping returning Veterans and we talked about suicide rates and my concern for that. I have personal knowledge also with Veterans that have committed suicide, one of them family member. So the question is, is what is the -- why are there so many suicides today compared to previous warriors? Is this something to do with the complex that we're fighting versus the World War II versus Vietnam or are there other factors? In speaking with people that are in the field of social psychology they're coming up with the thought that our social media is having a big effect on us. I don't think we're in a position to do anything about that but when I look back on World War II and my -- my wife's family, she was raised by the Marine Corp essentially; they had their own little group to give aid and support. As it was mentioned, Veterans know how to talk to Veterans. We understand the issues. We don't judge. We can listen and lend a friendly ear and I think that's something, when you talked about a Veteran returning from a combat zone if there's been any combat and especially urban combat like we're facing in the Middle East, there's a lot of things going through your head about things that happened and what if's and who knows what else. And just being with people that understand and can relate to those issues I think is an important factor, that you're not with people that are going to judge you for what has happened by who you are or what you did like we were -- when we came home from Nam. The Veterans as Dave talked about, will support each other.
So at -- at the last hearing I wasn't aware that Dave and the Post were looking at the -- getting into this venture. I talked to him about it and he asked me to talk on it. And I support Bill 949 and that would authorize the bond for the purchase and he's talked about at length about the details of that. But the creation of centralized incubator, not only for Veterans but also for the community at large can pay big dividends. Connecticut once took pride in the small business communities that we have here in the state. Some of that is gone for many reasons but creating a small business incubator where Veterans can go to learn and as I -- I've run my own business a long time, I know startup is a bear and the -- having a place where they can do this and work in concert with other Veterans that -- to solve the issues of start-up companies is a very good idea.

As far as the value to the state, strengthening the economy, more businesses are going to create economic activity. Economic activity is going to strengthen the position of the state which is something that we need. Many businesses have left. We have to bring those back. I know I'm getting a little bit long on here but --

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Just summarize it and I'll open it up to questions, Mr. Thurston. Thank you.

DAN THURSTON: Okay. You have my full testimony there but there are a number of issues that I'm familiar with here. I've worked with Yukon and on the OASIS Center we were one of the sponsors for putting that in place and I also sat on the Veterans Advisory Counsel with Yukon so I'm familiar with not only that but also some of the
issues that the students are facing and why we -- the OASIS Centers were originally started.

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

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And regarding the OASIS Centers the Commissioner testified earlier that he thinks that they should be left for student Veterans. Would you agree with that?

DAN THURSTON: Yes, I do.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay.

DAN THURSTON: And as far as the study goes I think our -- our younger generation, the ones that are actually using it should be looked to for suggestions and be the foundation of any future plans for the OASIS.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Other questions? Okay. Thank you very much for your testimony.

DAN THURSTON: Okay. Thank you very much or your time and consideration.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next and I apologize, I believe it's Chris Angeloni.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Good afternoon. Chairman Maroney, Chairman -- Chairwoman Borer, my apologies, distinguished members of the Veteran's Affairs Committee. For the record, my name is Christopher Angeloni of South Windsor, and I am offering this testimony in support of House Bill 7244, which also contains the consolidation of House Bill 7059. Thank you for holding this public hearing
and the opportunity to submit testimony here today.

I stand before you as a disabled Veteran, having proudly served in Iraq as well as other locations worldwide. I have been a Connecticut resident my entire life and take great pride in this. During my time in service, I have advocated and worked with the Veteran community for years. In that, I have had the privilege to interact with heroes from World War II all the way through Operation Iraqi Freedom/Enduring Freedom to the current operations still ongoing today in Syria today. This has offered a great opportunity to listen to their stories, listen to their experiences, and listen to their hardships. With those hardships, many are imposed simply by living in this state.

While Connecticut has many great benefits, it is not a community that can reasonably support the economic impact of being a disabled Veteran. Not a single disabled Veteran chooses to be disabled. Oftentimes, a disabled Veteran is not able to maintain and sustain gainful employment long-term due to their disabilities and relies of Federal benefits simply to survive. With that being said, there is no cost of living adjustment per state at the Federal level for this benefit. Many disabled Veterans must live in the high-cost of living state with an income calculated at a national median, which as of 2017 was $60,336, which is far below the state median of Connecticut $94,449. So average -- excuse me. The median income in Connecticut is $94,000. Consider this. A 100% disabled Veteran makes $3,057.13 a month. Per year that comes to $36,685, roughly one-third of the state median income. Imagine trying to provide for your family, feed your family, house your family, on a third of the state median income.
More to consider. Of the entire population of Connecticut, only 5% are Veterans. Of that 5 percent, only 15 percent receive disability benefit compensation. That comes out to 0.76 percent of the entire state of Connecticut receive disability benefits. Currently there are only 3,418 who are 100 percent disabled Veterans in the state so overall the impact the municipalities would minimal per municipal being 169 municipalities.

While I support this Bill, there are many flaws. First the language within the Bill contains specifically the word, "shall" before exemptions, instead of "may" implying all municipalities are not bound under the requirement. Doing this, you cause Veteran migration across municipal lines, pressing Veterans to reside in towns with more favorable tax policies thus creating disruptions in local tax revenues.

Next, this Bill uses set values for property tax exemptions, which does not take into account the municipal cost of living, inflation, or rising housing costs. Connecticut has one of the highest costs of living in the nation with these low exemptions. The amount of money saved is low. For example, the median cost of a house in the state of Connecticut is $240,000 with an average mill rate of $40. This results in a property tax bill of $9600 per year. With the current exemption rate at the 100 percent rate, that would result in a reduction of about $300 for the tax bill being that it's $3000 off of the assessed value of the host. Not $3000 off of your tax bill. Taking $9300 from the $36,000 results in a quarter of the salary going directly to property tax every year from a disabled Veteran if they're 100 percent rated. Comparatively, if you consider
the median income rate, if you -- that would be about $20,000 a year if you have a median income by comparison of apples to apples.

Furthermore, the Bill as presented does not allow Connecticut to be competitive in attracting Veterans, let alone disabled Veterans. With the largest active naval base on the east coast in Groton, the Coast Guard Academy, which trains and employs some of the finest individuals to protect our nation, as well as Westover Air Reserve Base right over the Massachusetts border in Chicopee, the bounds of attraction to both the north and south are great. By altering the Bill and implementing aspects of House Bill 7059, we can not only attract, but also gain lifelong citizenship. We can retain retirees. We can keep our tax base and attract a larger tax base. This has been proven in states that implemented the above outlined tier-based exemption, excuse me below.

But there is a fixed based off surrounding Bills and laws from states with steady growing economies and populations, as outlined in House Bill 7059, which is consolidated into this one. I've given everybody copies of this so I won't go through the whole thing. If you want, you can read it all and save a little time. (Laughing)

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Now then I'll put it up for question.

CHIRS ANGELONI: Disabled Veterans have sacrificed friends, families, time, money, your freedoms. By offering this small revised benefit, you are saying we not only stand by you, but we support you. It also drives more Veterans into the state creating more revenue streams but also retains the vendors we have now. With that being said, I
support the overall Bill but I do believe we need to revisit some aspects of it. Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any questions? Representative Borer.

REP. BORER (115TH): I just wanted to make a quick comment. First of all, thank you for your service.

CHRIS ANGELONI: You're welcome.

REP. BORER (115TH): And those are some really good statistics and it puts things into perspective when you talk about the median salary and what a disabled Veteran would receive so I appreciate that. This Bill -- it's going to be a tough Bill to get through appropriations we understand in the climate we're in, but we also have a similar Bill that studies this. So, we're going to take a hard look at this Bill but we also know that we're going to be evaluating all the abatements and exemptions going forward as well so I appreciate all your input.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Thank you, ma'am. I appreciate it.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I can certainly attest this. The hard part is when we put mandates on our local municipalities and kind of go from above and that -- I'm always a little reluctant to do that. You know they're not -- they testified earlier about it, that it would be another undue burden and this has already been -- the last few years since I've been in office since 2015, the state actually hasn't been too friendly to its municipalities. So there is that -- just as long as you know we have to consider
those things when we're looking into this stuff and if we can find something that works, hopefully we can -- we're able to do that but I just wanted to make that comment.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Okay. I understand. I just want to point out that by offering this, the big thing the state constantly battles is retaining talent. Most of the best talent comes with our United States Military from officers down to the sub-base, many of which are trained down in Annapolis to Coast Guard Academy graduates to again, people coming over from Westover, right over the border in Chicopee. With those increase in migrations to populations in Connecticut, what happens? The towns receive more people that they can gain tax revenue from. Sales tax revenues. You know, we have a gas tax. Any time you're going somewhere you're going to gain gas revenue. Additionally I would also save the state funds because keeping these Veterans and relieving this tax burden would also offer them the ability one, to potentially afford homes. Two, to be able to buy vehicles, be able to buy a suit. The state wouldn't need to worry about potentially picking up drivers to drive for appointments. The long-term economic benefits are a lot bigger than the short-term impact.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Senator Anwar.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm going to speak from South Windsor. I'm the Senator from South Windsor and I'm also serving of the Mayor of South Windsor right now. So thank you for your service and thank you for coming and speaking to us. I think there's an opportunity here. I'll give you an example. What the state
had given us the capacity in dual municipalities if they chose, to give some tax breaks for property taxes for the seniors and it -- not everybody followed this but as soon as we were able to, we actually started to look at opportunities form the municipal end of this. There's an opportunity maybe for the state to have the municipalities be empowered if they decide to be able to do this. Let's not mandate them but actually they -- they can, if they make the decision, to be able to give some of the opportunities for this and then that will allow the municipalities to actually make our doors open to -- to people who are far more skilled in capacities to perform and help the community and community grow. So I look at this as a good opportunity to start to look at ways for both the state and municipalities to work collaboratively to give opportunities to the people who have done their share, so.

CHRIS ANGELONI: I definitely agree with that.

SENATOR ANWAR (3RD): And I'll fly in and I will talk to you more about this, so thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Chair, Madam Chair.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Anybody else have any comments or questions? Yes, Representative Wood.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Hi. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for coming today and sharing that. Can you just give us the statistic again for the number of disabled Veterans that currently live in the state?

CHRIS ANGELONI: Sure, I absolutely can. I actually included it in your packet, a whole lot of stuff.
REP. WOOD (141ST): Okay, great.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Total disabled Veterans in the state receiving compensation right now are 27,399 and that constitutes 0.7 percent -- 0.76 percent of the entire State of Connecticut's population. Of that, only 3 -- what'd I say? 3,418 are 100 percent disabled. So based on the consolidation Bill 7059 into this one, that would only allow 3,418 people to be completely exempt so you would not see a full exemption for the vast majority.

REP. WOOD (141ST): And the 100 percent disabled are not able to work at all, correct?

CHRIS ANGELONI: Most of them cannot work. The vast majority cannot work.

REP. WOOD (141ST): And the remaining disabled Veterans are -- do you know are they working? Or there -- is there like a combination of not working and working or maybe working part-time?

CHRIS ANGELONI: There's a very large breadth that -- being said, many of them have diabetic issues that prevent them from working or the thing in this generation is mental health. Mental health is a major, major factor right now that would prevent that. It's hard to gauge per say because you can be 10 percent but have outside factors that don't allow you to work. But we, the VA -- the best place and I always advise people to go take a look at if you're ever wondering what the state -- current state of Veterans is in the state, go to the VA Hospital. Take a walk through there. What I always tell people, if you've having a bad day, I've been there for appointments more than once; if you've having a bad day, go walk through the VA Hospital. Guess what? Your life don't look so rough anymore. It's a sad
thing to say but when you want to put a comparison to it, that's the best way to put it.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you.

CHRIS ANGELONI: You're welcome.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Are there any other comments or questions? Senator Oster.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much and thank you for your service. So I'm an Army Vet too and served during the Vietnam era so I'm a lot older than you, so. But we have passed -- we have passed a pleather of Bills to assist Veterans with property tax exemptions that are not -- that are not mandatory on towns but give them an opportunity to so choose to do that. So there is a -- I don't know -- I did put in a Bill this year to try to figure out what the tax exemption is actually worth in comparison to what it is and that's something that I think we have to do, whether we pass this Bill. We still need to do an assessment of everything that we have done and what that equates to in real dollars, so.

CHRIS ANGELONI: I can -- I can give you my personal one if you want. I don't mind sharing it with -- in here.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Okay.

CHRIS ANGELONI: So roughly my tax bill every year is $10,000, roughly. I save about $300 a year with the current status of the bill because the way that it's written it's $3000 off of your assessed value.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Assessed value.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Which only equates if I have a $10,000 tax bill to about $300.
SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Right.

CHRIS ANGELONI: When you consider that most Veterans in this state, the average tax bill is roughly somewhere between 8 -- we'll say $8,000 and $10,000, give it a little wide gap; I'm on the high end saving $300. Imagine if the Veteran is not working, 100 percent disabled, they make $36,000 a year, we'll go low end, charging them $7,700 that's what? Just a little under a quarter of their entire pay for the year. That's not counting transportation. That's not counting vehicle taxes. That's not counting medical care, because if you're 100 percent you're receiving some sort of medical care, and that's not counting family care.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So that's why I think we need to present like you have, the hard data. I think we need to get some hard data on this so if I'm giving a tax abatement to a firefighter they get $1,000, not $1,000 off the assessed value but $1,000. And I think that that makes a bit of a difference in what we're actually talking about. So someone who has been in the military gets $300 but someone who has been -- and I'm not -- and I'm not saying they shouldn't get the $1,000. What I'm saying is we need to reassess what we've done for Veterans and bring that up to where it should be, what the original intent was. So I think it might be even more than $1,000 but also think that we have to figure out how are having municipalities honor their Veterans without re -- without thinking that they're a burden you know, getting a tax break or whatever, so.

CHRIS ANGELONI: So, I agree with you. I apologize Senator. I just -- I love the state of Connecticut. I was born here. I was born in
Hartford. I grew up in Manchester. I moved to South Windsor about three or four years ago, love it here. There's a reason I haven't left. With that being said, my whole goal is to try to do what I can to make the state as great as I can with ideas and thoughts.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): I agree. I think that there's a lot and we're going to see a lot more growth down at the sub-base with the expansion of the Columbia class so I think that's going to be important for us but I want to thank you for coming up and speaking on this issue and thank you, Madam Chair for allowing me to speak.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. And I believe, I'm just looking from my notes that we did vote for that assessment and that study at a last Committee meeting so that is going forward and we will continue to take a hard look at this Bill.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Great.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for your testimony.

CHRIS ANGELONI: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. Our next speaker is Doug DelGobbo and he will be followed by Lynette Peterson.

DOUG DELGOBBO: Hi everyone. I just came up here with Chris and I didn't know I was coming here until yesterday so this will be really quick on my end. So since he provided all the facts I'll just give one quick personal testimony. I'm also a life-long resident of Connecticut. I'm 51 years old. I served 22 years active duty in the Air Force, came back here and I now work here for the Federal Government at the Department of Veteran
Affairs in the Compensation Department so I work with Veterans and for Veterans every day. I probably touch about 25 compensation cases and I have conversations with Veterans all the time and the biggest concern that I have is how many of them, and I'm one of them myself unfortunately who is already looking to where I'm going to retire and leave Connecticut. I don't want to leave Connecticut. My family is here, my friends are here, my network is here, the trails I hike with my dog are here. But you know like the stats that he shows, it's hard to stay here. And you know, you look at a state -- everyone says you want to go to Florida or Texas, which really take care of Veterans well but there's a state, Illinois; nobody ever says I want to go retire in Illinois to get out of you know tax burdens. They actually provide 100 percent property tax exemption across the board for the whole state if you're 70 percent or higher and I'm not necessarily saying that we Connecticut can do it, but if a state like Illinois can do that for 70 percent or above, and there are 13 other states in the country right now and it's growing every year, that give a full, full property tax exemption for 100 percent permanently disabled Veterans. The Veteran's 100 percent permanently disabled and he wants to stay in Connecticut it's almost impossible. And it's just a shame that we have to have Veterans run away every -- you know from the state to go retire elsewhere.

And then there's the other side of it. You know when we get older we're going -- you know we might have disposable income where we have to -- you know older people put money into the economy and they're going to go and put this money, if they have the disposable income in a different state
and that just seems to be a shame for the State of Connecticut. But I just wanted to share that with you today. I mean I talk to Veterans all the time and I'm not speaking on behalf -- for Veterans. I think there are a lot of Veterans that are behind me that are definitely more established it and better at it than me, but just as a regular person coming off the street who serviced and is a life-long resident of Connecticut, it is a concern that I just wanted to bring your attention to. And I thank you for letting me speak today.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for speaking. Any comments or questions? Don't go anywhere. (Laughing)

DOUG DELGOBBO: I have a lot of data too but I didn't bring it. But it was for my own personal family to look at and I broke down all 50 states and I had everything that you could think about that a Veterans would look for that I can provide.

REP. BORER (115TH): You can feel free to send it to the members or to the Chairs of Committee. We would be interested in looking at that.

DOUG DELGOBBO: Absolutely.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Senator?

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very, Madam Chair. So I would just like -- I have a couple of questions and they more on the line of your experience. So if you're working for the Federal Government, I got an e -- text the other day from and met with them on PTS and the number of folks who are committing suicide and so I was wondering if you thought it was -- and there is no talking between the towns were DD214 is file with DVA, with state VA and the Fed VA and so I think that -- I really think that we have to start looking at
what we're doing with post-traumatic stress. The liaison from Congressman Courtney's office stopped at my other office and said, we've got to do something pretty soon. The numbers are getting pretty high. And so I don't know if you have any opinion on what we're doing for post traumatic stress and the -- and the tentacles that are going on with that. That's question one and last my last question is about female Veterans.

And so not very many female Veterans are taking any of the resources or benefits that are available to them. We've been trying to come up with ways; we being a group of female Veterans; are trying to come up with ways that women will actually come forward on the issues and I think that that's important in your role. Do you see female Veterans coming out more or less than they used to or even at all? And so I have those two questions. Post traumatic stress and female Veterans. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

DOUG DELGObBO: As far as the post traumatic stress, I think post traumatic stress is kind of similar to how the NFL is looking at traumatic brain injuries. It's always been there. It's just now really starting to come to light and it -- and so with that being said, this is something that's growing across the world -- you know across the country as far as now we're recognizing the effects of post-traumatic stress. This is going back before any of us were born. And the VA is looking at it. I mean the VA is making -- you know for someone who works for the VA and is also a Veteran, you know there are Veterans that have issues with the VA because of the past with the VA. But I know Hartford VA is taking good steps to do what we can to help Vets. Post-traumatic stress is something that's new and we're looking
into it but we do have more and more cases coming up and I think that's just more -- I think the cases have always been there, but there's also -- Veterans are very proud too and not all of them want to come forward, you know? And especially ones who were shunned before the VA for the older Veterans. I'm not sure if that answers your question 100 percent.

But as far as -- as women, we have -- I mean we as a VA, most of us are behind the scenes as far as working on claims for them, but we do go out to help Veterans 'cause not all of them know how to fill their claims out. And we also have females who work there, both Veterans or civilian or like who work with me -- beside me and sometimes we have them available because why do -- you know men too. It's not just women who have suffered from say PTSD for sexual assault for example. They're not going to maybe want to come and talk to a man or visa versa, so we have people in place there who we have designated to talk to someone so maybe they will come forward and come speak to us about it. I mean we're not counselors per say. We're not on the health side. We're on the compensation side but from my own personal experience, we're seeing it a lot. We see the claims and we see the personal statements written for both females and both the post traumatic stress issue and they're both coming to light more and it's pretty alarming actually to see how many cases there are when they do come forward. And post traumatic stress is a big part of the percentage of ratings that we are getting for people who are 100 percent sometimes because it's a little bit hard to quantify. But I read some of the statements and what they've gone through and it's pretty jarring. And that's something else I might want to recommend. I think
there was a gentleman who was against the -- I don't know if I heard him correctly but it looked like he was exempt -- the opposite of what we're trying to come with earlier, maybe a couple of speakers ago. And I think sometimes the people who are against trying to give benefits to the Veterans really should do what my friend said. Walk down to a VA Hospital. We have homeless Veterans which is a shame that we should have any homeless people, let alone Veterans, and it's alarming. I just wanted to just come today just to maybe just open up eyes a little bit and say, is this something we could do? If no other state was doing it I could understand but we're a pretty rich state here. I know we have Bills and I've never walked in anybody's shoes on the other side of this. I know how that's like, but I just wanted somebody to look at it. If other states can provide breaks to entice Veterans to go there, why are we losing our Veterans and anyone from Connecticut to go somewhere else when -- if they are 100 percent and can't work, we should be able to keep them here and take care of them like they took care of us. That -- that was just my point.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Anybody else have -- oh, Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Madam Chair. Just in regards, just you mentioned the gentleman earlier spoke against. I don't think -- he represented the towns and their concern is so often in this building, we put mandates on the towns 'cause we think things are a good idea here and then they have to actually pay for it. So by giving them the thing -- so I don't think he was up here to speak against Veterans or need to go to the hospital. I'm sure he totally understands that. It's a common -- that we make big decisions
here in Hartford and then we put them on 169 municipalities to follow through with it so -- and it happens over and over again. And that's what draws -- draws these property taxes up in the first place. So that's part of what his thing is to just kind of offset that. I don't think he was testifying against this you know -- or lessening what the Veterans do, so I just wanted to make that comment just to make that clear. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you Representative. Any other questions or comments? Okay, thank you. Thank you for your testimony.

DOUG DELGOBBO: Thank you very much. Appreciate it.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. Our next speaker is Lynette Peterson followed by Anthony, followed by Anthony.

LYNETTE PETERSON: Hi. My name is Lynette Peterson and I'll be brief. I'm with the Harry Ruffin, Jr. 206 and the 206 Inc group and I am a write, and what I do is -- or what I have done in the past and what I did with the group is create the programs that they -- so I write programs, and I created the programs with them according to their stories and according to the things they were already doing in the community, all the community service they were already providing. And so how -- how was it benefiting this group and then how could it benefit others? So every single program that they developed -- developed for the Bill 949 has been specifically thought out because it already is working, you know? So I just wanted to share that. And that's it.
REP. BORER (115TH): Very nice. I think -- I think you have a Senator that has a question or a comment.

LYNETTE PETERSON: Okay.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): Hi. Thank you so much for being here today and I know that you're being modest in the work that you've done to support the group and I think one of the best things about the project is the outreach and that how they have come together to see what Veterans have -- really need to move themselves forward and their families forward and I know you've been a big part of that, so thank you very much.

LYNETTE PETERSON: Well thank you so much. My brother's a Veteran and that's been my inspiration. And they have outreached to him which he wouldn't even respond to others so, I can see the benefit.

SENATOR ABRAMS (13TH): All right, thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's great, thank you. Anybody else? Comments or questions? Okay. So I'm going to kill this name. Anthony Garr -- is there an Anthony in the room, let's start with that? Oh, he's gone? Okay. All right. So then our next speaker is Joe Nolan.

JOE NOLAN: Good afternoon. Representative Napoli and other Veterans Affairs Committee members. My name is Joseph P. Nolan. I live in Waterbury, Connecticut. I am a Gold Star father and a Vietnam Veteran. Before I continue I want to deviate just for a second back to Steve Kennedy on the college waiver for Veterans. I proposed a Bill this year through Representative Napoli and it has not been brought forward but I've done quite a bit of research, not as extensive as some of these other
individuals but there's one thing the college waiver that you may or may not be aware of. Oh, by the way I happen to be a student even though I'm 69 years old, I happen to be a student at Housatonic Community College so I'm a little bit -- I've spoken to some of the Veterans people down there. There are -- there's something called a Chapter 33 Veteran and there's something called a Chapter 31 Veteran. Well when I came home from Vietnam we didn't have stuff like that so that was all news to me. But the point is, there are some war Veterans in Connecticut that are going to college right now that do not get a tuition -- I mean, I'm sorry, a fee waiver. There are other war Veterans in Connecticut going to college right now that do get a fee waiver. So that to me that's inconsistent. Why would some war Veterans get the waiver and other war Veterans not? So I think that's something that could be and should be addressed by your Committee and a law should come out of that.

Now the reason why I'm here today. I'm in support of House Bill 7244. That's AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR VETERANS HAVING DISABILITIES. I think the same should be granted to Gold Star families whose sons and daughters have made the ultimate sacrifice in wartime.

Now, I don't want to confuse people here today but I would like to read a very brief speech I gave up here almost exactly two years ago here in front of this Committee although I don't recognize a whole lot of faces. The Bill was called Senate Bill 918. It was called AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL OPTION PROPERTY TAX EXEPTION FOR GOLD STAR PARENTS. I proposed this act and at the time Jeff Berger was the state Rep from Waterbury that helped me out here. And this is what I said in
that speech. It's very brief so I'm going to read it.

If surviving spouses of Veterans are already allowed a property tax exemption, it would seem logical that the surviving parents of soldiers killed in action should be allowed the same exemption. In the case of fallen soldiers such as my son, Joe, who was never married, the tax exemption for surviving parents makes even more sense. Now don't forget this was two years ago.

In this era of Connecticut history where eliminating taxes is unheard of, asking for a tax exemption for Gold Star parents may seem preposterous. That being said, I recently learned that the states of Massachusetts and New York give annual annuities to Gold Star parents. Massachusetts gives $2,000 dollars each year to each Gold Star parent in that state. The state of New York gives $500 per year to each Gold Star -- Gold Star parent. While Connecticut does not have the Gold Star parent annuity program, I would suggest that the property tax exemption bill would be a positive way to recognize parents who have lost a son or daughter in military combat.

The amount of money that would be lost in tax revenues would be almost negligible. I say that because the number of Gold Star parents living in Connecticut is low in a state that has a population of over three and a half million people. Also, the dollar amount of most tax exemptions would be minimal in most cases.

For military Veterans who are also Gold Star parents, I would advocate that a double tax exemption be written into the bill.
One might ask, why should we have this Gold Star parent property tax exemption bill? One answer would be that the bill is a way to remember and honor our fallen heroes and their parents who have suffered a loss that can never be recovered or made whole again - at least not in this lifetime.

Again, I read that on February 28, 2017. Since that talk was given two years ago, that particular Bill proposal became law on June 26, 2017 when it was signed by Governor Malloy. It is Public Act No. 17-65, AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL OPTION PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR GOLD STAR PARENTS AND GOLD STAR SPOUSES. And if you look in your packet there's a copy of the Act in there.

It should be noted that the Bill is optional meaning that towns and cities do not have to implement this law. As far as I know, Middletown and Norwich are two cities that have approved this law in their cities. Also, with this particular law Veterans who are also Gold Star parents cannot claim two exemptions. I would like to see that provision changed.

Also, the exemption, and a lot of people don't realize this, the exemption is a partial property tax exemption similar to the Veterans property tax exemption. A lot of the people are under the impression that people don’t have to pay any property tax anymore because they're a Veteran and that's simply not true as was mentioned a couple of speakers ago.

I contacted Representative Napoli this year with the hope of making the Bill mandatory, the Bill from two years ago, not optional but mandatory for all towns and cities in Connecticut.
As I said above, I would approve of a new, larger property tax exemption Bill for disabled Veterans and their families.

However, I think Gold Star families should be included in that new Bill for the reasons I listed in the earlier speech two years ago. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. And I'm going to guess Representative Napoli has some comments and questions.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Thank you, Madam Chair. Mr. Nolan thank you very much for being here and thank you for your testimony on a very important issue. And I also want to express my condolences for your son, Joe. He may -- made the ultimate sacrifice and again my thoughts and condolences are with you. I'm curious. Does the state somehow, some way track Gold Star parents?

JOE NOLAN: I do know that --

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Or is that considered classified information?

JOE NOLAN: I do know that there's -- there's a woman civilian who I believe she works now over at the Armory. Her name is Megan O'Shaughnessy and she's a civilian worker working for the Department of the Army and she -- she tracks Gold Star parents in the State of Connecticut and she also sends out a monthly like newsletter to Gold Star families in Connecticut. I asked -- actually asked her that same question you just asked me and she said her computer wasn't working so she wasn't able to give -- able to give me that answer.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay.
JOE NOLAN: So, I don't -- I know that I'm involved with the Veterans Committee in Waterbury and my daughter and I attend -- they have a Gold Star Dinner in Waterbury every Memorial Day and every -- every Veteran's Day. And my son died almost -- almost 15 years ago so we've been going to those dinners pretty much every year. And what's happened over the years is, most of the parents that were there were Vietnam parents and all those parents, all those people I used to know, they've all passed away except for one -- one particular woman. As far as the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, there's been seven Marines and Soldiers from Waterbury killed in those two wars and right now I'm the only parent that goes to those dinners. There are one or two other parent -- two other sets of parents that I know but they don't really attend and the other parents I don't know if they moved out of Waterbury or what. And to answer -- I just can't answer your question.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Yeah, okay.

JOE NOLAN: But I do -- obviously, you know statistically most of the Vietnam parents have died 'cause it --

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Sure.

JOE NOLAN: Because the time has gone by.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay. And then in your testimony you talked about how Massachusetts and New York have the Gold Star Annuity Programs. Do you know how long those states have had those programs in place for?

JOE NOLAN: I know that the one in Massachusetts, this is kind of interesting, Rose and Joseph Kennedy, Sr.
REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Okay.

JOE NOLAN: Are Gold Star parents. Their son, Joseph, Jr was killed in 19, I think 1944, World War II. They -- believe it or not they received that annuity way back in 1944 and as far as the New York program, it's been in existence for a while. I can tell you that the Massachusetts program is each -- each Gold Star parent. In my case my wife is deceased but there's also a lot of Gold Star parents who are divorced people, but each parent gets this annuity and it's for life. And again, I -- I think we should have that in Connecticut but I think that's high in the sky and the state of -- the state that the state is in right now. But some of these other things I don't. I think are very, very realistic. I think the tuition waiver thing that Mr. Kennedy talks about or the fee waiver, fee waiver I should say is very realistic and I think this -- this tax thing, again I think it should be mandatory. And I think as that other individual mentioned, I didn't get his name, the numbers that we're talking about here, the dollar numbers that we're talking about here are really small if you look at the state budget. I think people need to you know, need to be aware that you know, my son, Joe is not a statistic. He was a real person. He had a great future ahead of him. He was fluent in Arabic and he was knowledgeable in Japanese and Spanish as well but he was definitely fluent in Arabic. He was in the Army. He was a college graduate, St Joseph's University in Philadelphia, four years of Japanese down there and then he did two years in the Army at the Language School in Monterey, California in what they call the Arabic Schoolhouse. He joined the Army without tell me. And he -- he actually joined before 911 just -- he
was actually in Monterey when 911 occurred. There were 30 people, 30 soldiers in this Arabic, what they call the Arabic Schoolhouse Language School. Within two or three months of 911 there were 300 soldiers in the Arabic Schoolhouse. But anyway he -- he became part of the first out of Fort Hood Texas and then the entire division went to Iraq in January of 2004 and actually he was home on leave in August of 2004 for two weeks, and then he went back and I was -- I have a son, another son and daughter. We were actually in Rome when my son died and I didn't leave an itinerary with our family or anybody. We were actually staying in a hotel right across the street from the American Embassy Rome when my son died. But because I didn't leave an itinerary, the Embassy knew that we were in Rome but they didn't know what hotel we were staying in. As a result I didn't find out about my son's death until I came home seven days later. And we -- my son, Matt and I, we flew into Philadelphia, not into Bradley. We were going to stay at my sister-in-law's house for Thanksgiving. So I went into her house. It was Tuesday night before Thanksgiving. I went to her house and I opened the door, and it was dark out, it was raining out. The first thing I see is my father, from Connecticut. And my father really has no contact with my former in-laws. Why would my father be in Philadelphia and I mean right away when I saw him I knew that Joey was dead. So I got -- I -- you know I walked into the living room and there was a soldier there from the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, what a Casualty Officer and I remember saying to him, I said, is my son going to be all right and he said, no.

But the point I'm trying to make is you know, it's not just another soldier. I've actually had
somebody said to me I shouldn't dwell on this but we only lost seven people from Waterbury in Iraq. What do you mean only? What are they saying? And we need to recognize the Gold Star families but we need to recognize our military Veterans and they say well, we can't. It costs too much money. How much is too much money? You know? Everybody is looking under the dollar bill. And we can't do that, you know? Do you know how much that's going to cost the state? I'm tired -- I've been to these sessions -- I've had four Bills passed since my son died and I'm tired of hearing well, we can't do that. It costs too much money. But they could -- they could afford to send my son for language school for two years, have him in the Army for five years, then he gets blown away. They could pay for that. I even had to fill out a form. I had to fill out an Army form, I can't remember the number. I had to fill out a Army form from the Casualty Officer because part of my son was missing, that I would accept his body the way it was. Part of him was missing. I mean, but we can't afford -- we can't afford a tax exemption? We can't afford a college waiver because it costs too much money? That's nonsense. Anyway.

REP. NAPOLI (73RD): Again, I'm very, very sorry for your loss and I thank you for the good work that you do on the Veterans Committee in Waterbury and I look forward to working on these issues with you in the near future. Thank you very much for being here today.

JOE NOLAN: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Anybody else have any comments or questions? Representative Wood.
REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for sharing the story with us. The two towns that passed your Bill raise last -- or in 2017, what prompted them to do so?

JOE NOLAN: Well the little that I know about Middletown, you have some Representative here today from Middletown, as it turns out it's a very patriotic city. I think aren't they the ones that just approved the military museum? I'm pretty sure about that. Norwich I would suspect their being so close to the sub-base so I would suspect there's a lot of retired Veterans that live down there.

REP. WOOD (141ST): And why do you think the other towns -- you know, do you think there's a marketing campaign or lack of information? Maybe the other towns weren't aware that this was something they could do.

JOE NOLAN: Well, I'm from Waterbury and I just -- I happen to know a lot of people in Waterbury so I'm a little surprised that we didn't get that exemption. But I -- I have the feeling -- in some cases, I have the feeling if somebody is a Veteran they might be a little bit more sensitive to other Veterans and other Veteran's concerns. Somebody who is not a Veteran will never understand what -- you know what it's like you know? And I think that's -- that's one of the problems. Although I will have to admit that you know, over the years, like when I first came home from Vietnam you know, people said, you were in Vietnam? You don't look like a Vietnam Veteran. I was real skinny, whatever. And people said, you were in the Marine Corp? Come on? You don't look like a Marine. I used to say, what's a Marine look like? I mean some of the -- some of the -- some of the best
Marines I ever saw had thick, thick coke bottle glasses, every bit of 5 foot 5, 5 foot 3, they were incredible people but you wouldn't know it, you know?

My son, Joe was sort of the same way. You know he had a great sense of humor. He was very serious about his job but he -- he used to make fun of the Army all of the time. You know, how silly some of the things were that they had to do. But as far as his job, he was an expert and he was you know, it's pretty unusual for an Irishman from Waterbury to be fluent in Arabic. I heard that it's harder to train an American to speak Arabic than it is to train an American to be an F4 pilot and I think there's some truth to that.

REP. WOOD (141ST): Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Any other questions or comments? I too want to also express our condolences. I know I speak on behalf of all the members of the Committee. And you did speak at the last public hearing about the Tuition Bill and I just checked. We haven't -- because I wanted to make sure I had my notes right. We haven't taken it out yet but it doesn't mean --

JOE NOLAN: Excuse me there's two issues. There's the tuition and then there's the waiver.

REP. BORER (115TH): The waiver, correct.

JOE NOLAN: So it's two separate Bills.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yep and I think we combine them and our next meeting is next Tuesday and we're meeting tomorrow to determine what Bills will be going forward so that Bill is still alive at the moment.
REP. BORER (115TH): And as far as the tax exemption, as we said earlier. You know, all of the members of the Committee we're on the Veterans Committee because we know how important it is to provide benefits to our service members and the Gold Star families and we're going to continue to advocate but we're not sure where this Bill will go, the tax exemption Bill. But we do have a Bill that passed out of the last Committee meeting that studies all of the exemptions and abatements but now that I'm thinking about it, I don't think we have Gold Star families in that Bill. So I think one of the things we can also do is add Gold Star families to that Bill as well on Amendment when it hits the floor.

JOE NOLAN: That would be good.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay.

JOE NOLAN: I would appreciate that, thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yeah, I think so. Okay. Any other thoughts or? Okay. Well, thank you very much for your testimony.

JOE NOLAN: Okay, thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yes? Sure. Go ahead. We only have one speaker left so I think we have a few minutes.

COMMANDER ROANE: To your answer to why Middletown did it is because of the American Legion. The American Legion got together and we talked to other Veteran organizations there but we took the lead and what -- with our state American Legion we convinced the elected officials that that was the least we could do as a city and so that's why it
was done in Middletown, because of the American Legion.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for that addition. Okay. Our last speaker, last but not least is Paul Small.

PAUL SMALL: Good afternoon, Madam Chair, other members of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I'm here on behalf of the Quinnipiac University Civil Justice Clinic in support of Senate Bill 861, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEFINITION OF SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR AND STATE RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTAIN VETERAN SERVICES. This bill stands to eliminate the residency requirement for certain state administered benefits. It is -- you know our position that this Bill is definitely a step in the right direction but it only represents a modest change in the statutory language that continues to put certain Veterans at a disadvantage. You know we propose that incorporating the language from House Bill 5668, which eliminates the wartime service requirement completely should be added to this Senate Bill. So I'm not going to beat a dead horse with the property exemptions, tax exemptions and what they do for Veterans but you know, it just doesn't make much sense that Veterans that decide to move to this state have to wait two years in order to you know have the continuous residency requirement in order to draw on the exceptions.

As well as you know the Veterans home at Rocky Hill, I'm not sure you know how strong that program still is, but it doesn't really make much sense to me that you know, Veterans have to wait two years and be homeless for two years in order to meet the residency requirement for that statute. So I'm -- we're proposing that this
Committee should consider amending Senate Bill 861 to incorporate the same goals as House Bill 5668 and remove this service in time of war requirement.

I just want to backtrack because I feel like I didn't even introduce myself to you all, so I apologize for that. My name is Paul Small. I'm a law student at Quinnipiac University. I'm also a Veteran. I served in the Marines for five years as an infantry machine gunner. I'm also a disabled Veteran so for me, you know this -- I meet these statutory requirements. I mean I fall into this Persian Gulf Era War even though you know it's not really the same Persian Gulf as we kind of think about it. You know, it just doesn't make sense to me that we define service and time of war and we treat non-combat Veterans differently based on you know, these arbitrary dates of service. You know, people that serve in the same job and do substantially the same tasks, you know don't really qualify for these benefits just by virtue of their service dates and to me, you know that doesn't seem unfair. And like I said, like I'm not someone that stands to benefit from this or anything like that so I'm just kind of outside looking in. So thank you for your time and consideration.

REP. BORER (115TH): Well thank you and thank you for your service. We had quite a number of remarkable speakers here today so thank you for coming forward. Are there any comments or questions? Okay. Well we thank you for coming forward and thank you for your time.

PAUL SMALL: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. I think we got every speaker. Did I miss anybody? Okay, great. Well
I want to thank everybody for coming today to the public hearing. Our meeting will be on Tuesday. We'll be voting on our Bills and I will see you all there.