Veterans' Affairs Committee

MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 12, 2019
10:00 AM in Room 2B of the LOB

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 AM by the Chairwoman, Rep. Borer D. 115.

The following committee members were present:

Senators: Abrams M. S13; Anwar S. S03; Berthel E. S32; Leone C. S27; Logan G. S17; Maroney J. S14; Osten C. S19

Representatives: Borer D. 115; Boyd P. 050; Ferraro C. 117; Linehan L. 103; Napoli R. 073; Vail K. 052; Wood K. 029; Yaccarino D. 087; Zullo J. 099

Absent were:

Senators: Rose K. 118

Representatives:

Chairwoman Borer began by reviewing safety information, and opened for remarks from chairs and vice-chairs. Hearing none, the chairwoman proceeded to item III of the meeting agenda.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF SB 777. The motion was made by Senator Maroney and seconded by Senator Anwar. Representative Vail moved to add SB 777 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Logan. Hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer moved SB 777 to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF SB 778. The motion was made by Senator Maroney and seconded by Senator Anwar. Representative Vail moved to add SB 778 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator
Berthel. Hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer moved SB 778 to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated that she would entertain a motion to JF SB 781. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Maroney. Representative Vail moved to add SB 781 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel. Hearing no objection, the chairwoman moved SB 781 to the Consent Calendar.

Chairwoman Borer stated that she would entertain a motion to JF SB 801. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Maroney, at which point Representative Vail moved to add SB 801 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Anwar, and the chairwoman moved SB 801 to the Consent Calendar without objection.

The chairwoman stated that she would entertain a motion to JF SB 860. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Anwar. Representative Yaccarino moved to add SB 860 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Representative Vail and, after hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer added SB 860 to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated that she would entertain a motion to JF SB 861. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Maroney. Representative Yaccarino then moved to add SB 861 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Representative Vail, and, after hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer added SB 861 to the Consent Calendar.

Senator Anwar, having been sworn in only eleven days prior, asked if all committee meetings were as amicable and smoothly run as this one. Representative Borer answered by taking the opportunity to praise the bipartisanship of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and to stress the importance of hard work in forming a bipartisan consensus.

The chairwoman then stated that she would entertain a motion to JF SB 863. The motion was made by Senator Maroney and seconded by Senator Anwar, at which point Senator Logan moved to add SB 863 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel, and, without objection, SB 863 was moved to the Consent Calendar by Chairwoman Borer.

The chairwoman then stated that she would entertain a motion to JF SB 950. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Logan, at which point Representative Vail moved to add SB 950 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel, and, after hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer added SB 950 to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman then stated she would entertain a motion to JF SB 951. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Logan.

Representative Yaccarino then asked for clarification regarding the percentage of seats the bill reserved for veterans, speculating that it might be too high. Chairwoman Borer deferred to Senator Maroney, who explained the fifteen percent of seats was just a
number, and that those seats would become available to the general public if there were no veterans to fill them.

Representative Vail then asked if the program was specifically for those seeking a master's degree, or if it was also available to those working towards a bachelor's degree. Senator Maroney responded that a bachelor's degree was a prerequisite for enrollment in the program, and as such the program was exclusively for those seeking a master's degree.

Satisfied by the senator's answer, Representative Vail moved to add SB 951 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel and, after hearing no objection, the bill was added to the Consent Calendar by Chairwoman Borer.

The chairwoman then stated she would entertain a motion to JF SB 953. The motion was made by Senator Maroney and seconded by Representative Boyd. Representative Yaccarino then moved to add SB 953 to the Consent Calendar, the motion was seconded by Senator Logan, and SB 954 was added to the Consent Calendar by Chairwoman Borer without objection.

The chairwoman then stated she would entertain a motion to JF SB 968. The motion was made by Representative Vail and seconded by Senator Anwar. Senator Logan then moved to add SB 968 to the Consent Calendar and the motion was seconded by Representative Ferraro, at which point Chairwoman Borer added SB 968 to the Consent Calendar without objection.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 5563. The motion was made by Senator Osten and seconded by Senator Anwar, at which point Senator Logan moved to add HB 5563 to the Consent Calendar and Senator Berthel seconded the motion. Hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer added HB 5563 to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated that before she would entertain a motion to JF HB 6775 (LCO 5913), she had to note that the Department of Education recently informed the committee of an existing program similar to what was proposed under HB 6775 (LCO 5913). The chairwoman continued by explaining that any further action on HB 6775 (LCO 5913) would be done after consultation with the Department of Education, to figure out how best to integrate the program into existing framework. With the disclaimer out of the way, Chairwoman Borer stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 6775. The motion was made by Senator Logan and seconded by Senator Anwar, at which point Senator Berthel moved to add HB 6775 (LCO 5913) to the Consent Calendar. Representative Vail seconded the motion and, after hearing no objection, the chairwoman added HB 6775 (LCO 5913) to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7134 (LCO 5939). The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Logan.

Representative Vail asked if the bill extends to veterans the benefits currently offered to seniors. Chairwoman Borer explained that the legislation directs the Department of Transportation to work out a discount, as is the process for senior discounts.

Satisfied by the chairwoman's answer, Representative Vail moved to add HB 7134 (LCO 5939) to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel.
and, upon hearing no objection, the bill was added to the Consent Calendar by the chairwoman.

Chairwoman Borer then stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7135. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Anwar, at which point a motion to add HB 7135 to the Consent Calendar was made by Senator Logan and seconded by Representative Vail. Chairwoman Borer, without objection, then moved HB 7135 to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7136. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Anwar. Senator Osten then stated that while she would vote to move the bill forward for the moment, she had reservations. The senator explained that, as a veteran herself, she worried that the benefit to veterans would be outweighed by the chipping away at the revenue generated by the Passport to the Parks program, and that lack of revenue had caused some state parks in eastern Connecticut to close. Representative Vail then moved to add HB 7136 to the Consent Calendar. Representative Ferraro seconded the motion, and Chairwoman Borer added the bill to the Consent Calendar without objection.

The chairwoman then stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7244. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Anwar.

Representative Vail voiced his concerns that HB 7244 would put a mandate on municipalities. Chairwoman Borer explained that municipalities have an exemption ceiling, and responded in the affirmative when Representative Vail asked if HB 7244 would raise that ceiling. Chairwoman Borer also noted that the committee has a bill to study the effects of exemptions like those proposed under HB 7244. Representative Yaccarino explained that the intent of the bill was to provide financial relief for veterans at the state and municipal level, given that such exemptions were not being offered at the federal level. The representative then changed topic briefly, referring back to HB 7136, and stated that the state needs to fund state parks. Senator Anwar brought the conversation back to HB 7244, stating that it was his understanding that the bill allowed municipalities to offer such exemptions, rather than mandating that they be offered.

At this point, Chris Reinhart from LCO was consulted, and explained that the exemptions proposed in HB 7244 would be required, rather than optional. Senator Osten then pointed out that municipalities are reimbursed for a portion of exemptions offered. Senator Berthel, through the chair, asked from where the money used to reimburse municipalities was obtained. Senator Osten, through the chair, responded that the money comes from the state, through OPM, and that assessors figure out the percentage of municipal tax exemptions that will be reimbursed by the state.

Representative Vail referred to the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities’ testimony in opposition to HB 7244, which prompted Chairwoman Borer to state that the CCM protects municipalities, and that it is the charge of the Veterans’ Affairs committee to protect veterans.

Representative Ferraro asked if the bill would go through the Appropriations Committee, and after being told it would, stated his intention to vote the bill through until the bill came back from Appropriations.
At the request of Representative Vail, the motion to JF HB 7244 was passed via roll call vote.

Chairwoman Borer stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7245 (LCO 5842). The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Abrams. Representative Vail asked if the bill was for the beginning of the school year, to which Chairwoman Borer replied that it would be in order to provide enough time for the applicants to be admitted prior to the first day of school. Satisfied by the chairwoman’s answer, Representative Vail moved to add HB 7245 (LCO 5842) to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel, and the bill was added to the Consent Calendar by the chairwoman without objection.

Chairwoman Borer then stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7246. The motion was made by Senator Logan and seconded by Senator Maroney. Representative Yaccarino, having been absent for part of the 2019 legislative session while recovering from surgery, asked for clarification regarding the difference between the National and State Guard, and what the justification was to empower the Governor to mobilize the State Guard. Senator Maroney explained that the statutes currently permit the Governor to mobilize the State Guard only when the National Guard had been mobilized, and that HB 7246 empowered the Governor to mobilize the State Guard in other circumstances, allowing for greater flexibility in responding to localized emergencies.

With the permission of the chair Captain Erich Heinonen, the Military Department’s legislative liaison, explained the composition of the Connecticut State Guard and its current role, as well as its proposed status under HB 7246.

Representative Vail then asked if HB 7246 “usurped” the authority of the President of the United States to command the National Guard, at which point Chris Reinhart from LCO assured the representative that HB 7246 in no way undermined any presidential power.

Representative Vail, satisfied by Mr. Reinhart’s answer, moved to add HB 7246 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel and Chairwoman Borer added HB 7246 to the Consent Calendar without objection.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7247 (LCO 5916), and noted that the JFS language worked with the existing 2-1-1 Infoline Program. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Anwar. Senator Logan moved to add HB 7247 (LCO 5916) to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Representative Yaccarino. After hearing no objection, Chairwoman Borer added the bill to the Consent Calendar.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7248, at which point a motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Logan. Representative Vail asked for clarification regarding continuation of in-state tuition if the stationed spouse were to be transferred. After Chairwoman Borer confirmed the spouse would continue to receive an in-state tuition rate, Representative Vail moved to add HB 7248 to the Consent Calendar. The motion was seconded by Senator Berthel and the bill was added to the Consent Calendar by Chairwoman Borer without objection.

The chairwoman then stated she would entertain a motion to JF HB 7249. The motion was made by Representative Boyd and seconded by Senator Anwar, at which point a
motion to add HB 7249 to the Consent Calendar was made by Senator Logan and seconded by Representative Yaccarino.

The chairwoman stated she would entertain a motion to JF SJ 3. The motion was made by Senator Osten and seconded by Representative Boyd. Representative Vail thanked Senator Osten for being the driving force behind SJ 3, stating that it was well past the time that the women of the Cadet Nurse Corps be recognized for their extraordinary service. The representative then moved to add SJ 3 to the Consent Calendar, the motion was seconded by Senator Berthel, and the bill was added to the Consent Calendar by Chairwoman Borer without objection.

Chairwoman Borer then stated she would entertain a motion to vote on the Consent Calendar. The motion was made by Senator Maroney, seconded by Representative Vail, and passed via roll call vote.

The chair then stated she would entertain a motion for a straight change of reference to the Finance, Revenue, and Bonding Committee for SB 949. The motion was made by Senator Osten, seconded by Senator Anwar, and passed via voice vote.

Chairwoman Borer said the votes would be held open until 4 PM.

At 10:47 AM, Chairwoman Borer called a recess until 4:00 PM, at which point the meeting was promptly adjourned.

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    Administrator                  Asst. Committee Clerk

Benjamin S. Watson