

CHAIRPERSON: Senator James Maroney,  
Representative Borer

SENATORS: Abrams, Anwar, Berthel,  
Leone, Logan, Osten,

REPRESENTATIVES: Boyd, Ferraro, Napoli,  
Vail, Yaccarino, Zullo

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Good morning. I'd like to call the Veterans' Affairs Committee public hearing to order. I'm Senator Maroney. Representative Borer and I are the co-chairs and she ran the last public hearing so I'll start running this public hearing. We do need to make an announcement. First, in the interest of safety I would ask you to note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors through which you entered are the room are the emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of an emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go straight 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 all-clear announcement is heard. With that being said, the first hour of this hearing is reserved for public officials. After that, we will alternate between the general public officials if they haven't finished testifying at that point

and so we are going to start with General Evon from the Military Department.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Good morning. Committee Co-Chairs, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer and the distinguished members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I'm Major General Fran Evon, the Adjutant General of the Connecticut Military Department. With me today are Colonel Tim Tomcho, our Staff Judge Advocate, and Major Erich Heinonen, my Legislative liaison. Before I begin, I'd like to thank Senator Maroney and Representative Borer and all the members of the committee for your continued support of the Department and the soldiers, airmen, civilian employees, and family members who defend and support the state and our nation every day.

Last year, over 500 Soldiers and Airmen of the Connecticut National Guard deployed in support of military operations around the globe. We currently have 150 mobilized today. Later this year, we will support with members of the 143rd Regional Support Group, they'll participate in Defender 20, which is a European-wide readiness exercise, while members of our distinguished Infantry Battalion will participate in another Defender exercise in the Pacific. This exercise will go to the Philippines and is in preparation for their upcoming deployment to Africa. Additionally, and simultaneously, more than 100 members of the Connecticut Air National Guard, our Flying Yankees, will also deploy to multiple foreign locations around the globe.

In addition to our federal mission, members of the armed forces of the state supported hundreds of local missions in support of civic and emergency preparedness events throughout the state. Your

Connecticut National Guard and the other elements of the organized militia remain ready to defend the state, and provide emergency response and support to our state's military community.

With that said, it's an honor to testify before you today. I thank you for your time and consideration of the four Military Department bills on your agenda. These bills serve to clarify current statutory language, ensure the proper and efficient operation of agency programs, and recognize the service of our members. I will briefly address each bill in turn.

The first is House Bill 5263, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SERVICE RIBBON FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES PROVIDING HONOR GUARD DETAIL. This creates a state service ribbon for members of the National Guard or organized militia who perform honor guard details at funerals of qualified veterans. Last year alone, the agency provided funeral honors for approximately 3500 veterans across the state. The award will provide a means to appropriately recognize our members who participate in this program and to encourage further participation. In addition to your support, I respectfully request substitute language addressing two minor revisions to the bill. I request that the award be appropriately limited to members of the armed forces of the state for which I have authority to issue awards, as well as language that provides some discretion to the establishment of an appropriate criteria for the award.

The second I'd like to address today is House Bill 5265, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GUARD. This one has been considered by this committee the past two

legislative sessions, each time receiving a joint favorable report. The bill clarifies 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 part of the organized militia and the state armed forces, but is distinct from the National Guard and Governor's Guard. It is largely comprised of retired National Guard members who possess unique skills or knowledge, such as engineering and logistics, which are of benefit to the Department in accomplishing its varied mission set. Members of the Connecticut State Guard are not state employees. They are paid from state funds at a rate equal to their federal pay rate for their respective rank in the armed forces of the state and are simply covered by workers' compensation while ordered to duty. It is a cost-efficient means for the state to accomplish its military missions as there are no overtime, fringe, healthcare, or retirement costs. Additionally, in response to a previous audit report, the agency sought a formal opinion of the Attorney General which validated our use of the State Guard in accordance with our agency practice. This bill clarifies the current statutory language in accordance with that opinion.

The next one is Senate Bill 221, AN ACT CONCERNING A MILITARY PERMIT FOR THE SALE OF ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR. This expands the agency's statutory military liquor permit to include the sale of all alcoholic liquors at state military facilities. Currently, the agency's permit only authorizes the sale of beer at state military installations. This proposal serves two purposes. First, it aligns state law with the operations of the federal Army and Air Force

Exchange Service on state military installations. That entity manages food, clothing, and beverage stores on military installations around the globe and is governed by federal regulations which permit the sale of beer, wine, and liquor. This bill aligns our state laws with applicable federal regulations. Second, the bill provides flexibility for the future establishment of similar state exchange operations which could better serve the needs of members of the state military establishment relative to the federal model.

Lastly, Senate Bill 222 is AN ACT ESTABLISHING A LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPORT OFFICE PROGRAM ACCOUNT. This is statutory clarification and is a resubmission that received a joint favorable report last year from this committee. This bill relates to the Department's administration of what is commonly referred to as our 1033 program. The program permits state governments to borrow a wide variety of surplus federal military equipment for use by state and local law enforcement agencies. Pursuant to the federal statute authorizing the program, my position as the Adjutant General has been designated as the administrator for the State of Connecticut on behalf of the Governor. In order to participate in the program, state and local law enforcement agencies are required to pay a nominal yearly fee based upon the size of their respective department. Annually, this amounts to about \$30,000 dollars which must be utilized to support the program in accordance with federal law. The Department utilizes these funds to administer the program, primarily by paying the salary of the member of the State Guard on State Active Duty to run the program, the same state active duty that we s just discussed.

Currently, the Department does not have a dedicated state account for this program. By passing this bill, the Department can ensure proper accounting of these programmatic funds and honestly, it eliminates an audit hit that we take each year because we are not parking these funds in the appropriate column. So this is simply, the administration of the program remains, this is a clerical fix that helps the agency as we go through annual audits year to year.

So thank you for your time and consideration of these important military matters that we've discussed today. I respectfully request these bills receive a joint favorable report from the Committee and support from your respective chamber. I look forward to providing future testimony on one of the remaining agency bills to be considered by this Committee, which is AN ACT CONCERNING THE STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZED MILITIA AND THE MAXIMUM AGE OF SERVICE IN THE GOVERNOR'S FOOT GUARD. That really concludes our brief. I want to say thank you again for your continued support to Connecticut's home team, the men, women, and their families of the Continue National Guard and the State Military Department. So thank you and I'm available to answer any questions if needed. Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): General Evon, thank you very much. Does anyone have any questions?  
Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, General, for being here. Before I ask you a question, it turns out we have, I'm good friends with Dan Murphy and you went to college with him and served in the military. So I do have a question on 5265. We passed in the past legislative sessions where we

wanted to pay the proper rate for guard members or retired guard members. I'm pretty sure we've done that so you want it to just be codified cause it seems like we're doing it now currently.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Well so I think and these, you can correct me if I'm wrong, but the statute as currently written doesn't necessarily allow us to mobilize individual soldiers in state active duty unless the entire guard is mobilized so this is also an annual audit finding like I mentioned in testimony, we have the Attorney General's opinion and here's the for instance or the so what. So yesterday there was a press conference on the coronavirus. This allows and codifies our ongoing practice where we have professional medical healthcare preventative medicine healthcare professionals in their civilian careers who are also in the Guard. This gives me the ability to bring that individual on in state active duty like we're doing tomorrow to get after some of the corona issues. We're going to review all of our policies and procedures so that lets me bring an individual like that or a certified civil engineer that can come in on state active duty. I don't want to use the term durational because they're not state durational employees, but it's a more cost effective way to bring someone on for minor operations or not long-term operations that quite honestly I don't have a state FTE to turn on or an employee to go to so it helps me fill gaps with specific expertise.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I agree 100 percent. I think we've advocated for this in the past but for whatever reason it's never been fully implemented

but I really, I personally agree that we should be doing this and I just wanted to make that clear.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: And again this was, the last two sessions did receive a joint favorable report.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right. So hopefully the full body of the legislature will pass it and codify it and do the right thing so thank you. I appreciate what y'all do.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Thank you, sir.

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

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Representative Vail, did you have any questions? Okay. Now I'll ask some questions. So just to clarify, currently the person who's operating the Law Enforcement Support Program, is a member of the Connecticut State Guard?

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Yes, and a retired member of the Connecticut National Guard and is a member of the guard, the state guard.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): And that is saving the state money I would assume and so this would just clarify the Governor's ability, and so on House Bill 5265, it simply seeks to clarify that the Governor can call the state guard into action without the National Guard being activated or a national emergency?

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Yes, sir.

TIM TOMCHO: Good morning, Senator.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Good morning.

TIM TOMCHO: I'm Tim Tomcho. I'm the Staff Judge Advocate Military Department. Effectively, what 5265 does is reorganize the state guard and the ability for the Governor to design the state guard. When 27-9 was first enacted, it was enacted around the WWI time period and of course, the Connecticut National Guard was fully mobilized so the language in there is outdated and we routinely call members of the Connecticut National Guard into the militia and pay them the federal rate. As Representative Yaccarino eluded to previously, you updated 2761 to clarify that members could voluntarily be called up rather than involuntarily called up which goes to the LESO bill which is 1033 program and there is a member currently, it's a PAYGO program so the police departments that participate in the program, approximately 79 in the state, can get excess federal military equipment for use at the local level and we do the program. It's not going to stop the program but we don't have an account for the program so we have to park the money that we receive for the program in a different account and of course, the auditors don't like that. So what we're looking for is an account for the LESO account to put the money into and to pay the individual that administers the count. As this program is set up, the Adjuvant General is the administer of the state coordinator for the federal government on the account, and he delegates his authority to Mr. Smith who is the one who does the day-to-day work. He only works two days a week so it's a perfect fit for this state. We pay him state active duty, he comes in, does his work and administers the program. Approximately \$30,000 dollars a year is what we

collect from the participating agencies and that is used to pay him.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Great. And so to clarify on that in the 1033 program, this Senate Bill 222 doesn't impact whether or not the program exists. It's more of an auditor's recommendation and so for this program I believe, I mean the maximum an individual police department pays is about \$1000 dollars a year and it allows them to access millions, I believe there was an article recently in the Connecticut Post that I think Bridgeport has \$2 million dollars' worth of equipment that they're able to access by paying this.

TIM TOMCHO: Throughout the state currently we have \$20.5 million dollars in federal equipment transferred to police departments around the state. There are some agencies that are paying but don't have any inventory, but they can also do that. Within the first two quarters of this year, we've added \$3 million dollars of inventory to local and state law enforcement agencies. As I said approximately 79 participate. Large departments pay \$800 dollars a year, medium departments pay \$500 dollars a year, small departments pay \$250 dollars a year to participate.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Great. Thank you. Are there any other questions?

UNKNOWN: Thank you for your testimony. I know that you spoke eloquently on the four bills that you had sent our way. While we have you, are there any other bills that you have on the list that you have any challenges with or you want to lend your support

to? I don't want to put you on the spot but while we have an expert in the seat, we may as well.

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: No challenges that we've reviewed, no, and we talked about it on the way over, no.

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

MAJOR GENERAL EVON: Thank you, again.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next, Commissioner Saadi from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: It is still morning. Good morning Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, honorable members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. My name is Thomas J. Saadi. I'm Commissioner of the State Department of Veterans Affairs and I thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I also want to make sure that we reach out and thank our veterans who are here with us today and those across our state and nation for their service and sacrifice so that we may all meet here today in this great democratic country.

As you know, I am currently serving on an active duty military mobilization; however, I've requested leave to be here today because I appreciate the important work that this committee does and your support of the department. As I'm on a domestic mobilization, I have been able to maintain oversight of the agency through regular contact via email, multiple weekly conference calls, and by using military leave to periodically return to work to Rocky Hill to work. However, I could not both serve our nation and serve our state's veterans without a

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great team of leaders who have kept the department moving forward in service to our veterans on a daily basis. I want to recognize some of them. Mr. Clark, our Fiscal Manager, could not be here today as he is feeling a bit under the weather, but he and Mr. Joseph Danao, who is our DVA Projects and Operations Director and a 27-year veteran and combat veteran of the Connecticut National Guard here, would you please stand up? He and Mr. Clark have been overseeing the other senior members who are here today. I'd like to introduce them very briefly. With me is our Legislative and Community Outreach Director, Tammy Marzik, to my left. Also, our Director of Residential Programs and Services, Lesbia Nieves, who is a combat veteran and currently a serving Lieutenant Colonel in the Connecticut Army National Guard and has 38 years of service. Also to my left is Ryan McKenna, the Director of our Office of Advocacy and Assistance, himself an Army combat veteran and currently serving member of the Air Force Reserve. Also, a new member of our team some of you may not have met and some of the veterans in this room may not have met is our Staff Attorney, Jane Siegel. Jane Siegel is a military spouse. Her husband is Major Peter Riviera who is currently serving in the Connecticut National Guard. I also want to recognize our chairperson, Michael Thomas of our DVA Board of Trustees who is here and Iraq and Afghan war veterans. We also have other members of our Board of Trustees here today and I thank them for their presence.

It is these men and women along with our statewide veteran service organizations who have been key leaders and a dedicated part of the DVA team in accomplishing our mission of serving those who have

served and I am so grateful for their service to the department and to our veterans across our state. With regard to the proposed legislation, the Department agrees conceptually with many of the bills under consideration; however, some may require additional resources which are not currently contemplated in the Governor's proposed budget, but I'm sure those are discussions that will happen through the legislative session as to how to address those concerns. My testimony, however, will focus on bills related to DVA operations, services and concepts that the Agency has previously supported.

Senate Bill 218 regarding ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTAIN VETERANS' BENEFITS. I want to thank the Committee for raising this bill which would extend eligibility for the veteran designation on motor vehicle license plates, driver's licenses, and non-driver's license ID cards to persons who served in the National Guard or Armed Forces Reserve components and received an honorable or under honorable conditions but do not have Title 10 Active Duty service beyond their initial duty training, which is Title 10 Active Duty service. This would also apply to persons receiving college credits related to a relevant MOS or military occupational specialty and substitution to meeting some course requirements. The Bill does not extend any other benefits to this limited group of veterans to receive what is a recognition but not a benefit program or services recognizing them for their honorable service in the National Guard and Reserve components.

I also speak in favor of House Bill 5262, AAC SPECIAL REGISTRATION MARKER PLATES FOR VETERANS WHO SERVED IN PERIODS OF WAR. I support the concept of

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this bill, which would create new license plates for veterans who served during I believe those periods of war identified in 38 U.S. Code 101, World War II, Korean conflict, the Vietnam Era, and the Persian Gulf War. However, one thing the Committee should consider as part of its deliberations is that service during particularly Korea, the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf wars does not necessarily mean that the individual served in theater or in direct support of theater operations. Some veterans' organizations have contacted me expressing this concern, and even veterans who served during that period said Commissioner, I'm a veteran, I was on active duty, I get a veteran's plate but I don't feel that I should have a Vietnam War veteran plate so consider that distinction as those who may serve in theater and direct support of theater operations, versus everyone served during that period of war as defined by federal law. Also as part of your review of this, possibly consider that some other periods of conflict may not be specifically defined in that section of the U.S. Code, but in other areas of law such as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were certain defined operations. I don't suggest that the Committee should have a plate for each operation, but just to look at those definitions of those conflict. What I have seen in some other state which do have a specific plate, let's say for Vietnam, Korea, WWII. Some also have war veteran and veteran plates. So that is another possibility. I believe Rhode Island does that. My brother-in-law has a war veteran plate versus a veteran plate and that is a distinction from those who were in theater versus those who were not. The only recommendation I would have on this is considering, I believe in

the draft legislation it says to utilize the colors of the flag of the country in which the conflict occurred. For most of those, a ribbon or a medal was provided for that operation so for example, many of us know and have seen the colors for the Vietnam service ribbon, possibly look at that as maybe the indicator on the plate.

Finally, I want to thank the Committee for raising House Bill 5264 which makes some technical adjustments in the DVA's report of annual veterans benefits. Currently, the way the statute is written is the report is directed to the Public Safety Committee which at the time the legislation was first initiated, the Public Safety Committee was a standing Committee, the Veterans' Affairs Committee could not raise bills and so that was the avenue for the report. This just makes that technical adjustment so that you as Committee members receive that report of annual services which the agency did promulgate this past Fiscal Year. I want to thank you for raising those agency bills as well as for many of the bills you have in support of our veterans and service members. I thank you for your time and service to our state, and I'm more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much, Commissioner. Does anyone have questions?  
Representative Vail.

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

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Good morning, sir.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Welcome back. A moment too early or?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I'll be back permanently the first week of June.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. We look forward to seeing you then as well and again, thank you for coming out here and providing support for veterans like you said all across the state and beyond. My experience with you has been phenomenal as has your office. The Commissioner even reached out to me from his active duty post and so I appreciate that and your staff's done a great job while you've been over there. So we've had a discussion in the past, when the chair persons and I met with a group of veterans' organizations in Rocky Hill last year, they had a lot of concerns and one was veterans' cemeteries and how they are being funded. They made us aware that we get money from the federal government for that and some of that money might not have been put towards its intended purpose. So there is a bill on the agenda, excuse me, I'll look up the bill number but it's to create a non-lapsing account specifically for veterans' cemeteries. It's House Bill 5267 so I know we've had that discussion. First, I just want to get your opinion in general. If you could give us an explanation how that money comes in, where it goes and then how you receive it and if you think that you're getting the full amount.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Okay. Thank you for the question and for your support of the agency, of our veterans across the state and this is a very important topic to bring up for discussion. The State Department of Veterans' Affairs oversees three cemeteries. Two of them are non-operational since our original cemetery in Darien has been closed

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since 1985. Colonel Gates Cemetery in Rocky Hill is limited to those veterans who are veteran patients of residents. What you're familiar with is the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown which is our fully functional cemetery. We also receive federal dollars for capital improvements there and you see those projects going on now. The money that you're speaking about that the bill proposes to put into a non-lapsing fund is reimbursement for burials and if there's more detail questions, I have staff here that can assist with that. Those dollars approximately between \$350,000 to \$400,000 dollars per year depending on the number of burials that occur come from the federal government and go into the state's general fund. The agency then receives our appropriation pursuant to what's passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor as part of our biannual appropriation. And so we fund our cemetery operations through our general salary line items for our maintenance people and others at the cemetery. We also fund operations and expenses through our operation expenses appropriation. We do not have a separate line item for the cemetery either for salary or for operating expenses known as O&E. What I ask in any consideration is whatever occurs that it not reduce in the end the appropriation we receive, as right now we are absorbing what we need to in order to put more resources into the cemetery because of the projects that you're seeing that we've expanded within our current footprint, the number of burial plots available. The federal government has assisted with a significant amount of dollars for a realignment and appearance improvement project, but that also means we have to put more maintenance and care as we

should going forward. So right now we're able to absorb that initially. In the long run, we will probably be looking for more avenues for some additional dollars to support that. I just want to make sure that whatever is done, whether it's a non-lapsing account or not, that in the end we don't see a net reduction in dollars because those reimbursements can fluctuate from year to year because they're based on burials. They're not based on any number or requirement of care for the cemetery.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And that's a very detailed description. I appreciate that but I'm understanding correctly so if we had x amount a thousand and we got, is there a specific dollar amount we get per burial?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: If I may, Senator? \$780 dollars for each veteran burial in our cemetery.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And again, obviously that's going to fluctuate from year to year. And so that money goes into the general fund and then your overall budget is your appropriation so there's no way to actually determine whether that specific amount of money goes towards a specific purpose?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: There's not a way to tag a dollar that comes from the federal government to the general fund and follow it through literally an expenditure by the department. What I can say is the appropriation we receive from the state is greater than the overall dollar amount that we receive from the federal government in reimbursements and other federal programs into the general fund but that said, I can't identify

specific dollars flowing through those various funding sources.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And again, so your overall appropriation is basically the money you use for your budget throughout the year.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: That's absolutely correct.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So again, so this money, there's just no way, there's different things going into that but so if that money was taken out and okay, I understand it. So if that money was taken out, you're concerned that they would then take that amount of money and give you less in their appropriation overall?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: That could occur. The other, if I'm correct in reading the bill for non-lapsing accounts which again, can be a very positive thing depending on how they operate, is that it would be for operations and maintenance, that it wouldn't be something that we could utilize as part of our salaries line item to staff up and that's another concern. I wouldn't want to lose staff and have a non-lapsing account only for operations and maintenance. So it would have to be a balance in the long run but I think it's a good discussion to have going forward and oftentimes, you know these discussions happen over time and to develop a proper solution.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And I agree so again, if this isn't the right avenue I don't know, but at least we're finally having the discussion. I'm a firm believer that if we're taking money from the federal government for a specific purpose, that's where that money should be spent and nowhere else and so I

certainly have concerns with that. I think when you have an overall, it blends into the overall appropriation, there's no way of knowing if that full amount is really going towards its purpose or none of it at all is going towards the purpose and there's no way to really gauge that without having a non-lapsing account. So maybe there's another way we can find a solution. I'd be happy, I definitely think we need to bring awareness to this and keep this on the front burner and if you and your staff have any suggestions on how we can better approach this, I'm certainly willing to listen to it but I do think it's an important thing that we keep focus on this and then you also have your two other cemeteries. So where does the money come from to maintain those for the cemeteries you know that are closed?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: That again is from our general appropriation through our salaries maintenance group for Colonel Gates especially. We do receive some community-based support if I'm correct, Mr. Danao and Ms. Marzik from Darian, the Darian Police department and other groups and organizations in Darian help us with maintaining and the upkeep of that cemetery and they're great partners in that. That cemetery was closed back in 1985 because it met capacity but that also begs another question just for the committee in the long term to keep in mind is again, the capacity of the cemetery as we look over the next several years to expand the physical footprint of the cemetery because it's a public report sent to all members of the committee that over the next 7-10 years, depending on burial rates, we will be approaching capacity in the current configuration.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Thank you, Representative.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Representative Ferraro.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you, Commissioner Saadi for your testimony. I wasn't able to catch all of it but I caught a good part of it. One thing I know from working with you in the past, you're certainly one of the most organized commissioners I know and you're very thorough, very open, and I really appreciate having the ability to work with you over the years. I just had one question regarding the plates and you were discussing the period of war and some periods of war that were not included, Granada, Kuwait, Persian Gulf, etc. Is there any discussion ever regarding the Philippine operation because I do have a number of veterans who have approached me and asked me about that?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: If you, are you speaking to the Philippine Nationals who served as guerilla operations supporting the U.S. during WWII?

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Okay. I have not had that discussion although I do believe there are just as with our treaty allies from WWII, some veteran benefits that are provided, some of those individuals. I just do not know offhand and I'll defer. I don't know if Mr. McKenna, if you have that information specifically. Okay. No. There is, particularly with WWII, treaty nations especially you know with Canada and England there are Canadian and English Nationals who do receive

some federal benefits and recognition who have become U.S. citizens but served as part of treaty nations. I'd have to circle back with you on that specifically with regard to the Filipino Nationals who supported and served with the U.S. much like the SGU Units and the Mung in Vietnam.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): I appreciate that and if you could circle back to me I would appreciate that. And going on and following up on that, you talk about being able to recognize those non-periods of war, countries with a generic type plate, is that what I gather from this?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Currently Connecticut has a standard veteran plate. That plate applies whether you were in service during wartime, out of wartime, in theater or out of theater. My understanding and I don't want to put words in the Committee's mouth is this legislation is to recognize those who served in theater for certain periods of war. In particular, I know some of this has come forward and I've heard it from many Vietnam vets because many states do have Korea war plates and Vietnam war plates. So that's my understanding what the goal of this is and so I wouldn't take away, I wouldn't recommend eliminating the general veteran plate, but adding or grafting on top, which I think is the intention, these other specialty plates.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): Okay. And that would be in the form of a facsimile of the metal that was presented, is that?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: So every medal or ribbon, every medal has a ribbon and there's standard colors that represent a certain conflict or certain operation

and those, I would imagine, I don't know the technicality of it with DMV in issuing those plates but could be put on there, rather than the flag of the country in which the conflict occurred.

REP. FERRARO (117TH): And you think that the, there would be, would there be a savings going to that or the savings you're talking about is having a generic way to recognize all these different conflicts.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: I'm not raising in terms of cost savings at all but just the appropriate, and I would defer to veterans' organizations but the appropriate way to recognize would be the service ribbon or the campaign ribbon for that period of war.

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

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

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you, Commissioner. First, I want to thank you for doing double duty and serving us in two capacities, and I also want to thank your team because they have been so responsive and really great about giving us the information that we need when we inquire throughout this legislative process so that's a testament to you building that team. You don't want to build too good of a team [laughs]. On the cemetery account, so I think what I'm understanding you saying is basically careful what you ask for, right? A little bit?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: In a way especially because a title or a concept is very different from the

details of legislation and how it ends up operating when you put, how it ends up affecting the end state when you put it into operation.

REP. BORER (115TH): The end result might not be favorable. Okay. And you might have said this on the cemetery, but you said in 7-10 years we're going to reach capacity? The Middletown Cemetery?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: And I just want to confirm, Mr. McKenna, that's correct, so we commissioned a full spectrum master plan study of our Middle Veteran Cemetery, the demographics of the state, age, location, choice of burial method whether it's full body interment, cremation, with or without honors. We conducted surveys in public hearings, significant input from many of the veterans who are here today including members of our Board of Trustees and then that report was promulgated. Based on the data, the organic data, that's the estimate and the reason there's such a range, 7-10 or longer, is we just don't know what people may choose in the future from the standpoint of locating or relocating. We could have more veterans move into the state or leave as well as choosing other options but we want to be cautious and conservative. The reason being is if we look back historically in the 1980's and Mr. Danao and Mr. McKenna can correct me if I'm wrong, I believe for five years or more, we did not have an operational state veterans' cemetery when Darien reached capacity and that's not something that we want to have happen again. So myself and the team have already begun reaching out and looking at potential plots of land which are identified in the report as well as possibly others. You know commissioners change but my feeling at this time and

I think it makes sense is not to look for another location in the state, but to look for expanding where we are. Middletown is centrally located. You don't want to have to duplicate operations in two different locations. You wouldn't want members of the same family, let's say siblings who pass years away from each other to be in different cemeteries if they want to be in the same veterans' cemetery. So I will send out again that report to everyone as a reminder and that's a discussion I'm having with the administration, with the Department of Administrative Services, with legislators to make sure that we're not waiting until we reach crisis. We want to be ready and start to aggregate that land and there is some state land right across the street as well that we're looking at so I put that seed in everyone's mind to know that we have to keep this in the forefront so that we're not behind that proverbial eight ball as we were back in the 80's.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great. Thank you for being proactive and searching all options and all avenues. I pulled up the Korean license plate while we were talking. It actually has a map of Korea on it so it says, hang on, Connecticut and then it says Korean War Veteran and it has a little symbol of the map so I think this bill generated because Vietnam Veterans had come forward and said we would also like an opportunity and then as we started talking about it we thought well, what other designations don't have a specific designated license plate so that's where that generated from but we certainly have more work to do on that. There's another process that if you want any specialty plate and actually we have the Senator from Transportation Committee here, there's a process where you seek out 400 signatures and you

can do it through a grass roots effort, but that is a very complicated process and to ask our veterans to go out and get 400 signatures when many of them are disabled is I think a little challenging for them so we were looking to see how we can do this legislatively so I appreciate all your input.

COMMISSIONER SAADI: Absolutely. Any information that myself or my staff can provide in working towards getting to that goal, we are here for that purpose.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Are there other questions. Commissioner, so thank you for starting the planning for you know what to do with the cemetery and to expand capacity. So if I understand there is potential state land in the vicinity. Is there any other land that you're contiguous or in the nearby vicinity that you're?

COMMISSIONER SAADI: There is, Senator. There is a contiguous piece of property, approximately 13 acres, next to the cemetery. There is another piece that's somewhat privately owned. There is a piece of property across the street which abuts the state property which is privately owned and then there's property that the CVH, Connecticut Valley Hospital has that's not occupied at this time. So we're looking at all options. Again, if we go outside the realm of state property, some amount of money will be necessary and we'd like to proceed in a negotiated way with any of the private land owners hopefully not having to look at anything like eminent domain but that this can be done in a negotiated way but anything that is private property

being added to the cemetery would require some additional funds.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Something for us to keep in mind but I think it is important to start planning. It's not often that contiguous property would come available so if it is available, I think we need to look at that so thank you. Thank you, Senator. Are there any other questions? Okay. Thank you very much for your testimony. Next, Senator Kissel.

SENATOR KISSEL: Good afternoon Chairman Maroney, Chairwoman Borer, ranking members Logan and Vail, and distinguished members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am State Senator John Kissel, serving seven communities in North Central Connecticut, Enfield, Somers, Suffield, Windsor, Windsor Locks, East Granby, and Granby. I'm here with my constituent, Susan Patricelli Regan in support of Senate Bill 217, AN ACT REQUIRING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR EQUINE THERAPY FOR VETERANS, and I'd like to yield the rest of my time to Ms. Reagan to explain once again the great strides that her facility has made in the last year. Thank you.

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: I am Susan Patricelli Regan. I am President of Foxfield F.A.R.M. and I am here to speak on behalf of the proposed Senate Bill 217. Thank you to the Chairman, Senator Maroney, and Chairwoman, Representative Borer, and the VA Affairs Committee for the opportunity to present testimony for this bill today.

I wish to make the following salient points relevant to S.B. 217 and to bring your attention to the packet distributed to you today, this is this

booklet, with a cover legend page that clearly delineates the aspects of our proposal and the supporting documents. As I have a limited amount of time to speak, I will focus my dialogue on the actual financial perspectives to the VA Committee beginning on page two under the orange tab. I urge you to read at your leisure all three colored sections page by page as it is a comprehensive overview that verifies background rationale, our publicly recognized venerable equine capability by equestrian industry professionals. Our accomplishments over the past 12 months and our published articles relevant to our objective with S.B. 217.

I will draw your attention to one point under the pink tab and it is AN ONLINE 2/8/20, *The Hill Article*, federal house passes bill to allow the VA to fund service dogs for veterans with PTSD for which the relevance to S.B. 217 is that Representative Phil Roe (R-TN), a ranking member of the house VA Committee, is that in full mental wellness does not have a one-size-fits-all solution, which is why the VA must provide innovative and out-of-the-box treatments to help veterans combat these invisible illnesses and thrive in their civilian lives, Roe said.

So I will now draw your attention to the proposal. It is a specific prospectus to the Committee. It is comprised of a coalition between Foxfield F.A.R.M., Granby, Connecticut, a ground work equine instruction and Ray of Light Farm's Horse Feathers Program in East Haddam, Connecticut horse driving instruction which we met at Stand Down Day at the veterans' home and hospital in Rocky Hill, Continue.

We determined that we had common goals through the equine approach to addressing the challenges of PTSD suffered by veterans by reducing anxiety/stress and improving confidence and a renewed sense well-being. Our respective programs are instructional curriculums in the various aspects of horse management given by experienced equine personnel. Specifically, this is a natural method to PTSD improvement support not a clinical/prescriptive process which has not significantly improved the recuperative progress, 22 suicides a day, and in fact has inherent risks with opioids and self-medication.

The test program parameters are as follows: The VA to identify and provide five veterans per above participant programs, ten total veterans, programs at each facility to be held during a six-month period of April 2020 to September 2020. The curriculum for each veteran at respective facilities to be six weeks, one per week for 2-3 hours each session. Surveys from each veteran to be taken at the end of each session as well as observation commentary regarding same from respective participating facilities and objective reports from VA therapists as to the status of each veteran's post program completion. Cost to VA for each facility's program provision is to be \$5,000 or \$10,000 total. This amount will apply whether fewer veterans participate or drop out. Substitutional Veterans to be considered by hosting facilities if determined appropriate. The prospectus' success to include agreement within parameters to dollars going forward for a second year to a set maximum amount to be assigned to each program inclusive of Foxfield F.A.R.M. and Ray of Light's Horse Feathers. NOTE

that any changes or deletions in medications or opioids prescribed by the therapists during that test period should be reported in order that we can get a clean test and understand the status.

In summary, we believe that this prospectus meets several VA affairs objectives providing optimum options for our brave service men and women who suffer from PTSD and related mental issues, is fiscally oriented and prudent in our budget challenged state by capping the outside cost, lower cost approach that can supplement or even replace more costly clinical therapy and prescription methods, less risk, less stress, educationally trade oriented and functionally more enjoyable for the participants. During this short legislative session, we have provided a constructive financial solution to PTSD. Remember, primum non nocere, first do not harm. We hope that you will read our comprehensive packet provided to you today and give serious consideration to passing S.B. 217. Thank you and I welcome any questions.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Are there any questions from the Committee? Senator Kissel, I'll ask you a question. Since we are looking at insurance, requiring insurance to cover this, has this been raised with the Insurance Committee?

SENATOR KISSEL: Chairman Maroney, when we first offered this proposed bill, it did not appear initially that it was going to be raised by the Veterans' Affairs Committee so we did also seek to have it raised in the Insurance Committee and I have been told by Senator Kelly that that measure is going to be raised so perhaps in the interest of

economy, if this Committee could send this bill over to insurance, it may be more appropriately in their bailiwick but I think it's important that you folks hear the very laudable goals and I think economic and public health of equine therapy for posttraumatic stress disorder and other mental health needs of our wonderful veterans, so yes.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. And this proposal I think differs slightly from last year in that we're proposing a pilot program?

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: That's exactly correct. Pilot program is a very good determination, yes.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Try to learn from past attempts.

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: It was actually raised, the issue of an open checkbook thing, how many would it be, how long, how many would be included and so I thought that by putting parameters around this, this would give you not only a clearly defined financial aspect, but it would set the parameters for actual measurement by the standards by which we see rather than typical clinical therapy.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. And approximately how many veterans are serving now if any?

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: We have served 15 veterans who fully completed the program. We have two from the fall who started the program and transportation became a consideration and they had to put that off. That's probably been one of the biggest deterrents. Also, we have two who started in the fall and are going to continue in the spring. They did not have

a transportation problem but cold weather puts them off. [laughs]

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions from the Committee? Senator Leone?

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming back. One quick question. How long would this program be for a veteran if they enrolled in their program? Is it an ongoing thing or is it a couple of weeks?

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: I will be quite honest with you. It's a six-week program. Many of them will say that they want to come and live on our farm or come back or work on the farm. We don't actually employ anyone to work on the farm but once they're there, they don't want to go. They don't want to leave.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Right and so --

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: And they do improve, no question. I can tell you personal stories of improvement that would blow your mind actually.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Now, you know, in our attempt to always help veterans recover from whatever issues they may be facing and if this program is successful and you do get insurance coverage, I could see then other programs trying to follow the model or even provide some kind of competition. There might be other horse equine organizations that might want to apply so --

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: I can respond.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Yeah, could you?

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: If I may.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Yeah, cause that would be sort of a red flag to consider.

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: Yes. Well I am quite prepared because I thought you would ask that question. We determined also from our previous addresses to your Committee that you wanted some assurance that there would not be scam artists out there or other people who were trying to mimic what we were doing and then submitting bills and then you would supposedly have to pay them perhaps. We had our curriculum actually trademark certified by Denise Merrill, the Secretary of the State so it is a specific program to be done a certain way within a certain time frame within certain parameters with certain horses. So if there were another farm that wanted to participate, say in the second year if you were to go on with it, they would have to meet our criteria. We would have to visit the farm, we would make sure that that program and we would continue to merit that farm and tell you whether we believed they should be included or not because I have to tell you that in the horse industry, there are a lot of people out there who do so who own a horse.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Right and I guess that would sort of lead to a future question, I don't think it's something now but at some point, let's say this type of program starts to proliferate because of its success. Then the question becomes who should be the regulating authority if anything were to go awry or just maintaining the proper services when it comes to horses and equine therapy. I mean, do we have to create another agency for review [crosstalk].

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: For overview. For overview. Monitoring and overview.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Yeah, like who should --

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: I'd be happy to serve on it if you'd like to appoint me. [laughter]

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): But currently there isn't one.

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: Well yeah, that is a question that I mean I don't want it to be a deterrent to our objective which is to help the out there. I mean there are always to any plan the left-hand turns that one can make. I am from a corporate world in which I always have planned a plan B, a plan C, and a plan D in case that didn't work. I'm sure that I can construct something that would determine that we would have an ongoing monitoring system to that but I would say probably sticking with our two farms to begin with and not adding others too quickly until we ascertain their ability to actually carry it out.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Great. Thank you. And I'll look forward to the Insurance Committee's input in terms of how they would handle liability and coverage and so forth cause that would go hand-in-hand with this concept.

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: Yes, of course. I would think it would be. We have insurance covering us so I would think the individuals might have insurance covering them so I do appreciate that. Thank you.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? Thank you very much for your testimony.

SUSAN PATRICELLI REGAN: Oh thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): So since we did start a few minutes after we're not quite within our hour yet so we will continue with a public official before going to the general public so Representative Sredzinski?

REP. SREDZINKSI (112TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, members of the Veterans' Committee, ranking members, vice-chairs, Senators, Representatives, thank you for having me. My name is J. P. Sredzinski, State Representative from Monroe and Newtown, and I'm here on behalf of the House Republican Caucus to testify in support of House Bill Number 5087, which is AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS FROM THE PASSPORT TO THE PARKS MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION FEE.

You may recall this bill from last year, House Bill 7136 in 2019. It passed this Committee unanimously. We feel that this is working bringing up again. This bill is an important House Republican proposal to allow the veterans of our state who have served to be exempt from paying the Passport to the Parks fee. I'm sure by now you all know what the Passport to Parks fee is. I know I've received a lot of emails about it. It's the \$10 fee that you pay on your vehicle registration and we feel that it would be important to exempt the veterans who have served our country, served our state so nobly be exempt from paying this fee. I think that we can all agree that the cost to the state would be well worth the sacrifice and service that have been made by our veterans. So we urge the Veterans' Committee to once

again pass this bill out of Committee and allow veterans to be except from the Passport to Parks fee and I will be more than happy to answer any questions.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Great. Thank you. Are there any questions from the Committee?  
Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Representative. I would agree with you. I know this passed out last year. I certainly would be in favor of exempting everybody from paying the Passport to Parks fee but certainly we should start with the veterans and definitely go from there cause I think it's a great place for them to go and you know get out there and exercise. I appreciate you advocating on their behalf. Thank you.

REP. SREDZINKSI (112TH): Absolutely. These are parks, these are beaches, these are places where a lot of people can get some well-deserved relaxation and they're resources of the state and I agree with you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Are there any further questions? If not, thank you very much for your testimony.

REP. SREDZINKSI (112TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair.  
Thank you, Committee.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next, so we'll start alternating from the general public so Justin Simpson?

JUSTIN SIMPSON: Good afternoon Committee Co-Chairs, Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, who stepped out and the distinguished members of the Veterans'

Affairs Committee. My name is Justin Simpson and I am the legislative liaison for the National Guard Association of Connecticut. The National Guard Association of Connecticut for anyone in the room who might be unfamiliar, or NGA CT as you'll probably hear me call it going forward, is a private, not-for-profit professional association that exists to improve the welfare and efficiency of the Connecticut National Guard, as well as to ensure the welfare of past and present members in recognition of their service and sacrifice to our state and our nation.

Thank you for your past support of the Military Department here from the Committee and the Connecticut National Guard. In order for our National Guard to maintain its strength, readiness, and capabilities, we require the support of the state. The state benefits you have conferred to our guardsmen and women and your support of the efficient operation of the Military Department and Connecticut National Guard are greatly appreciated. Our goal is to expand these benefits in the future in order to help ensure the Connecticut National Guard can maintain or increase its troop level and associated capabilities well into the future. NGA CT stands to support and advocate for any and all legislation that will positively impact Connecticut National Guard readiness and the welfare of its members. Like I said, past and present. We look forward to our future endeavors together with this committee and again, thank you for giving me the opportunity to be here.

Today, I am testifying in support of the four Military Department bills on your agenda. I'll

address each in turn. The first is Raised House Bill 5263, that we heard the General talk about earlier, and it's AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SERVICE RIBBON FOR MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES PROVIDING HONOR GUARD DETAIL. So this bill would create a service ribbon for the National Guard or organized militia who preform honor guard details for qualified veterans and as you heard the General say, this is an amazing group of men and woman who performed funeral honors for approximately 3500 veterans across the state. Earlier in my career, I personally had the opportunity to do over 80 funerals, and I still consider it one of the greatest honors that I've had in my career thus far. The people that we work with who continue to do these funeral honors are certainly deserving of recognition for what they do in honoring these veterans. I think it is only just and fair that Raised House Bill 5263 receive a joint favorable report to honor the individuals preforming funeral honors at The Adjutant General's discretion.

The next one is House Bill 5265, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CONNECTICUT STATE GUARD. The General did a good job going into detail, but this bill will clarify how the agency utilizes the State Guard on State Active Duty for short periods of time at a low cost to the state. The purpose of the State Guard is to utilize members, mostly retired members of the Guard, who possess unique skills and knowledge to accomplish specific projects and missions for which they are suited. They are paid at their federal pay rate and are covered by workers' compensation during their word period. This program is a great way to increase mission success and efficiency without the high cost of

hiring a state employee or engaging in the lengthy contracting process. This bill merely codifies current agency practice as supported by the Attorney General.

The next one is S.B. 221, AN ACT CONCERNING A MILITARY PERMIT FOR THE SALE OF ALCOHOLIC LIQUOR. So this bill is intended to align the state law with the federal regulations that are already in place that govern the Army and Air Force Exchange Service outlets on our National Guard bases which permit the sale of wine, liquor and beer. Currently, our state law only currently permits the sale of beer at these exchanges so in addition to clarifying the ambiguity in the law, this bill is also a first step in planning for future similar state exchange operations for which the Department would have greater control and be able provide better goods and services to our members.

The last bill that I came to speak on is S.B. 222, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A LAW ENFORCEMENT SUPPORT OFFICE PROGRAM ACCOUNT. This bill would establish a proper state fiscal account for the established federal program through which state law enforcement authorities may acquire, mostly on loan, surplus Department of Defense equipment. Currently, there is no account for the money dedicated to the program to be deposited or withdrawn from by the Connecticut Military Department which is the agency designated by the Governor to manage this program. The agency uses the funds to pay for a State Guard member like we just talked about with the act concerning organization of the Connecticut Guard, and the goal of this bill is to simply establish a means to properly account for programmatic funds.

So thank you for your time. I respectfully request this committee act favorably upon these bills in support of our past and present Connecticut National Guard members and I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Great. Thank you very much. Does anyone on the Committee have any questions? So just to back to the ribbon, 3500 funerals a year so essentially we have ten, approximately ten a day and these are volunteers who are going out?

JUSTIN SIMPSON: Yeah, so to answer that, they have, they have approximately when I was doing it a couple of years ago, they have approximately six people on orders but the rest are volunteers and how it works is like when I was going to college up at UConn, they would call me and be like they, there's a funeral near UConn on Tuesday, are you able to do it and I'd be like I don't have class until 3:00, I can do it and then I would go to the cemetery, meet whoever else I'm working with, and perform the funeral honors so it is within our guardsman that do it but most people who perform these funerals are volunteers from their area.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): It seems providing a service ribbon is the least we can do to thank those volunteers for their time --

JUSTIN SIMPSON: I think so as well.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): And providing that honor so thank you. Does anyone else have any further questions? Okay. If not, thank you very much for your testimony.

JUSTIN SIMPSON: Yes, thank you all again.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): So next, Representative McGorty. I apologize, McCarty. [laughter].

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): That's fine. Good afternoon Chairman Maroney, Chairman Borer, ranking members Logan and Vail, and distinguished members of the Veterans Committee. It's a pleasure to be here with you again today. So I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill 220, AN ACT EXPANDING CERTAIN VETERANS' ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS and I'll tell you a little bit about how I became aware of this in a moment but this bill I believe would go a long way in protecting veterans' benefits. Currently, the Department of Social Service looks at income eligibility when determining various state assistance programs and the practice has been that some of the federal benefits such as Aid and Attendance which helps with medical expenses and home care have been used in the past as income rather than a medical reimbursement and with that practice, what happens is that the person then may be denied eligibility for certain state programs and the reason I know this is because a constituent of mine, Eileen DeGaetano who you may not have met but she's been very prominent here in advocating for veterans and the elderly. She's the person who really pushed the Nurse Cadet Program last year. It was her father who was denied services because he took the Aid and Attendance and because of that, he was denied the homecare for the elderly services and the waiver program, and this was unbeknownst to them and it caused a great deal of anguish and pain within the family so Eileen has been advocating for a change in this. I think it would be incumbent if

we could look at the Department of Social Services, how they determine the eligibility and work together so that we can remove some of these barriers that are not really providing the overall quality and healthcare that all of our veterans deserve.

As you know very well, we are moving more and more to homecare services. It has saved the state over \$380 million dollars last year. It improves the quality of life and to have a person as my constituent who is 95 years old, who served in WWII, gave selflessly of himself, then to be denied a state assistance program to me, we need to do something. This bill also refers to looking at Energy Assistant Program so it's a little broader but I think that it's -- and I'd be happy to work with the Veterans' Committee, whatever I can do to help this kind of thing forward to remove all the barriers that are there so I thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns and for raising this bill in Committee. Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Are there any questions? I timed it perfectly.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Well you'll be hearing after me from Senator Formica and Senator Kelly and they're very familiar with the program as well so thank you again to the veterans.

REP. BORER (115TH): Sorry, my mouth was full. This bill came up before and we reached out to the Department of Social Services and actually James and I had a meeting in the summer with some attorneys who are working on this and we certainly want to do everything we can to keep people in their homes and we don't want to count this, but when we speak with

DSS, they said this is, that we are calculating, that they have a different perception of how we're calculating this so if we could get live examples that we can walk through specifically with DSS to demonstrate this happened with this person, it was counted it, they were denied, that would be really helpful for us.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Yes and I think we can help provide some of that for you so thank you very much and thank you for the communication with DSS. Very much appreciated.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you.

REP. MCCARTY (38TH): Thank you. Have a good day.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): You as well. Next, Patricia Kelly and I also had forgot to state previously that you have three minutes to testify so please keep your testimony to three minutes and then there's time for questions after that. Can you please press the button till the red light goes on? Yep. You're good now.

PATRICIA KELLY: Okay. Thank you. I'm here in support of Bill 217 and I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Patricia E. Kelly. I am a United States Marine Corp Veteran. While in the military, my occupational specialty was Message Decoder. I had a Secret and Top Secret clearance. I decoded messages out of the Vietnam War for the War Department.

After serving in the military, I starting working for Neighborhood Legal Services, upgrading bad paper for veterans, predominantly Vietnam veterans who were discharged with less than honorable discharges. I've taken these cases all the way up to the Pentagon and won. I am a lifelong equestrian and 36 years ago I developed an organization in Hartford called the Ebony Horsewomen. We have been serving veterans for the last 32 years. We are certified in equine assisted therapy and over 12 years ago, we certified in equine assisted psychotherapy. I know personally how impactful equine assisted is particularly for black and brown veterans who are generally and usually under-represented. It is very helpful for the veterans to have the horses to try to find the causes and the root cause of their trauma. We often talk about posttraumatic stress. Many of our veterans are in active trauma; not post-trauma, but active trauma and horses help tremendously.

So I'm here in support of equine-assisted therapy but I urge you, please do not gentrify this bill. It cannot work just in the suburbs for a certain demographic. We operate in the urban centers. It is extremely important that these veterans, particularly your black and brown veterans have representation with culturally competent staff. I have in our program four Connecticut licensed therapists who are black and brown people and that is extremely important to serve black and brown veterans particularly. Talk therapy does not work when the trauma is that deep and there are also cultural reasons for black and brown veterans that make talk therapy even more difficult.

So I am here in support of Bill 217, but I urge you, do not gentrify, please, this bill and I'm open for any questions you may have.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Does anyone have any questions? Representative Borer.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you for your testimony. Do you believe that equine therapy is more beneficial than other animal therapy and if so, why? Tell us why.

PATRICIA KELLEY: Absolutely. First of all, horses are prey animals. Dogs love us no matter how much stuff we got going on inside of us. Horses have the ability to tell the therapist whether or not there is trauma present and whether or not it's active trauma. Because they are prey animals, they will shy away from any individual who has trauma going on, anxiety, depression. They will not join up so it gives the therapist immediate feedback. Horses also have the ability when working with them to lower stress. It also works very well for our male veterans because it doesn't take away their dignity. These are big animals. Oftentimes, talk therapy will cause a man to have masculine issues but working with these big gentle giants, they keep their dignity. They keep their masculinity and they get the stress release and anxiety release that they need.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Are there any further questions? So I do have some questions for you as well. You do mention you're certified in equine-assisted therapy. Can you just discuss the certification process?

PATRICIA KELLEY: We've been certified by EAGALA and we have also been certified by O.K. Corral. This happened, oh God, 10, 12 years ago.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. What is EAGALA? You mentioned you're certified by EAGALA, could you explain --

PATRICIA KELLEY: Equine Assisted Growth and Learning and they're in 35 countries across the world.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): So that's an international organization?

PATRICIA KELLEY: It is.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): EAGALA. Okay.

PATRICIA KELLEY: But we also have become a certifying agency ourselves, particularly looking at the cultural needs of black and brown veterans and black and brown clients as well.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): So can you mention how you became a certifying agency and through what, I guess what the process is?

PATRICIA KELLEY: We've been working on this for over 12 years, worked with a lot of agencies throughout the country, EAGALA for one, developing the curriculum and the competency to become a certifying agency ourselves, particularly looking at the cultural needs that had not been addressed in equine-assisted therapy. Because equine-assisted therapy has normally only been seen in the suburbs, it's also attracting only a particular demographic without the cultural competency to actually address black and brown people. So our certifying abilities

also take into consideration the cultural aspects of veterans or the client itself.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you and I have seen articles recently, I mean additionally I think they're starting to use equine-assisted therapy for autism and other, you know other issues as well so.

PATRICIA KELLEY: Quite a great deal of issues.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): All right. Are there any other questions from the Committee? Representative Borer.

REP. BORER (115TH): I guess actually this wouldn't be a question for you, this would be a question for us because it has to do with insurance coverage. I'm wondering if this is in the Insurance Committee as well?

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): And I will answer that one for you [laughs]. So yeah, the Insurance Committee has raised a similar bill when we spoke with Senator Kissel so we discussed with him potentially just referring this bill to Insurance so they could combine the two bills but thank you very much for your testimony. We're going to alternate and so back to public officials and I cannot read this name. Steve Topliff.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Good afternoon. Bear with me, first time coming before you, it's an honor. My name's Steve Topliff and I am the assessor of the town of Rocky Hill. I'm also a veteran of 33 years. I'm a member of the VFW, the American Legion, and I'm also a disabled veteran. I'm here in the capacity, as the assessor. Senate Bill 218 is proposing to

change the language of 27-103 which defines a veteran.

To answer your question from the Commissioner of Department of Veterans' Affairs, you asked him about essentially 27-103, before 27-103 was changed the last time the legislature changed it, it included in veterans' benefits, as a veteran anybody that was a member of an allied force, allied to the United States during WWII. That would've included the Philippines, France, England, those countries, Canada, but when you amended 27-103, and referred it to the Federal U.S. Code 38-101. I've not found where it includes those Allied Forces to be included in the veterans' exemption so the unintended consequences to the actions of the legislature and that's why I'm here. With Senate Bill 218, I'm opposed to it mostly because of the change in the language to 27-103 that includes initial active duty for training purposes as a veteran. These are people that joined the National Guard. In our current state of readiness, the National Guard is a key part of our force.

Since September 11, 2001, it's an integral part of our force but if you go back in history, a lot of our Reserve and National Guard forces weren't deployed during a time of war and that would include Vietnam all the way up through current contingency. Those forces were not utilized in the defense of our country so they might, these would include those as veterans, and receiving veterans' benefits. There's a lot of Vietnam guys here in the room that actually served in country. They deserve every honor they're eligible to be given but there's also people that would cover who joined those branches to get out of

service of their country and they would include those people with this bill and the way it's written and I'm opposed to it just for that fact, that we would be including people that actually joined a branch to get out of service of their country as opposed to those in this room who I see over here with a purple heart and the silver star. They actually earned their, the right to call themselves veterans. But the impact on a municipality is that you brought in the language of a statute. It includes more and more people and this would be an unfunded mandate to a municipality if you expanded this so I don't have any written testimony, it came up.

But anyway, things that if you really wanted to help a veteran that you could actually amend and help would be 12-81(53). It's the vehicle, it's the one vehicle exemption and if you just put in the word, the language a member of the Armed Forces that domiciled in the State of Connecticut, that would help us assessors and municipalities out a lot. That would actually help out the city and the town of Groton immensely. They have a lot of people that are there under the Service Member Civil Relief Act and I know this year, the Office of Policy and Management is going to be coming to you for clarifying language of 1262. 1262 is the law that allows for the increase of veteran's exemption under 12-18(19) to 12-81(26). The law is clear the way it's written which allows for the increase of it but the way they want to clarify it will make it so that veterans' exemption never increases ever again based on the formula they're gonna propose and that's my testimony, but I would testify to any bill that

changes 27-103 is not fiscally responsible for this legislative body to approve.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there questions? Senator Osten.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much for coming up today. You are an assessor in what town?

STEVE TOPLIFF: The town of Rocky Hill.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): The town of Rocky Hill and do you, have you looked at the, do you have volunteer fire companies that are in Rocky Hill?

STEVE TOPLIFF: We do.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And do they get a straight tax abatement?

STEVE TOPLIFF: They get an abatement. The legislature last year modified the abatement from \$1000 to \$2000 and they get a \$2000-dollar abatement of their taxes.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And would that not be fair to say that in many cases they're receiving a significantly higher dollar amount than the veterans' tax abatement which is based on the assessment of the property?

STEVE TOPLIFF: They are. I will tell you this. Under Connecticut State Law, under 12-81(21), I believe is the severely disabled veteran, under that statute, the exemption is \$10,000 dollars. In Rocky Hill, we've doubled so it's \$20,000 dollars but if you've lost both legs or both arms or an arm and a leg, that exemption is less than the [crosstalk].

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Just so you know I'm a Vietnam era veteran so I get it. I get what you're saying but I'm also talking about the fact that there is not parity between someone who was not disabled, a veteran who served without a disability does not have that same tax abatement and you did not, I noticed that in your testimony you did not talk about and you know if what you're talking about is giving veterans benefits, and not equating it to what it would cost the municipality two things. One, would you require that all municipalities do the optional tax abatement across the board that veterans are eligible for because many municipalities don't do that.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Rocky Hill just happens to be one of those municipalities that do not enact a lot of local options.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So I'm asking you a direct question.

STEVE TOPLIFF: I'm not a fan of any local option. I think if you're gonna do something it should be mandated.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Well as an assessor you believe that across the board that should be true in every municipality? I'm asking you specifically as an assessor. Were you in the military?

STEVE TOPLIFF: I have 33 years of service, yes.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): So then you know what this means. So would be willing to say out loud as someone who served this country and someone who is acting as an assessor that we across the board change local options to have them approved across

the board is the question? Small question, yes or no answer.

STEVE TOPLIFF: But there's big ramifications to that question.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): I understand what the ramifications are. I was a first selectman for 12 years so I get it and I passed the local options too so I get that you don't want to answer [crosstalk] that question.

STEVE TOPLIFF: The easy answer is I believe that yes, but --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. Okay. My next question, thank you for that answer.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Okay.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Yes, as an assessor you believe that they should just be across the board granted so that is a true recognition of military veterans. The second question I have for you is the tax abatement. I noticed you didn't talk about that either and I put in that one to do a study because I get complaints or concerns that the relative value of what was once decided is not there any longer. That value of taking a certain percentage off of the assessed value of the property does not equate to what for example a firefighter abatement is.

STEVE TOPLIFF: That's true.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): And so I'm asking your opinion on Senate Bill 224, which would require simply a study and then ultimately I would come back with implementation to make sure that veterans are receiving the same abatement as any other you know,

personally I think that veterans should get a higher amount but you know any, than other firefighters or first responders. Would you be in favor of that?

STEVE TOPLIFF: I oppose the study, Senator. I think it just happen.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): You're saying it should just happen. So you would like me to change the language today but you didn't testify on this bill so I'm okay with that [crosstalk]. I'm really okay with that because I think that's great but if that's a matter of the record, you as someone who has 33 years in would like to see us put into effect that a veterans' tax abatement is equivalent to what first responders get or more?

STEVE TOPLIFF: Yes.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. I appreciate that.

STEVE TOPLIFF: But --

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there other questions? Representative Vail?

REP. VAIL (52ND): Well I don't know if anybody will want to come up here and testify after that. Geez. [laughter] All right. I don't know, it kind of put him on the spot a little bit. But anyways, thank you for coming up today. I certainly understand where you're coming from on that. Oftentimes here we at the State make decisions and say hey, this is a great idea and then we push that burden back on our municipalities so I would just like to say thank

you. For the record, Mr. Topliff and I actually played high school football together and he was a heck of an offensive lineman and helped me gain over 1000 yards so he's always had my back and I know he's always had the backs of veterans. I'm certainly interested because I want to do whatever we can responsibly to help our veterans. Yeah, I'm more concerned about you know veteran suicide and getting people jobs, making sure there are no homeless veterans, getting them the proper therapy they need, than just getting them tax abatements so, and there are unintended consequences on the things we do here so I certainly understand where you were coming from. When we pass things, sometimes we do it with blinders on to try to help people feel good instead of actually getting something done so I don't particularly care for when one of my colleague's kind of attacks a witness. I think that's unprofessional and you handled it well but I just want to give my two cents. I appreciate your opinions on this and certainly need to take a deeper look to make sure that when we're doing something, that we don't have any unintended consequences that adversely affect anybody else but thank you. I have no questions. I just wanted to make a comment and thanks for coming up today.

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

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you for coming to testify. I have a totally different question. Last year, we passed an increase in exemption for our disabled veterans.

STEVE TOPLIFF: 1281-20.

REP. BORER (115TH): I don't know the number.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Thank you. You increased my veteran's exemption by \$500 dollars.

REP. BORER (115TH): I sent out a --

STEVE TOPLIFF: Which equates to about \$16 dollars in tax. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Every \$16 dollars helps. [Laughs] I had sent out a communication on that to the veterans that live in my district and I was surprised by the number of veterans who reached back out to me saying they weren't aware that they were entitled to these exemptions so I sent them to their tax assessor's office to learn more about it and sometimes you can get, what is it, three years back?

STEVE TOPLIFF: On the veterans' exemption if it's missed you can receive an exemption as long as they filed their discharge here in Connecticut up to six years in arrears.

REP. BORER (115TH): Wow. Okay.

STEVE TOPLIFF: It's a tax collector's statute.

REP. BORER (115TH): Oh. That's good to know. So my question to you is do assessors, who sends out communications to the veterans letting them know that there are these exemptions available?

STEVE TOPLIFF: You know a lot of times it will be the veteran administrator in the town. I do my best to do outreach. Being a member of the VFW and the Legion I get to independently reach out to a lot of people. I'm actually still a member of the Connecticut National Guard so my Army boss was here earlier today and I try and reach out to them, make

sure that they know the benefits that they're eligible for but there's no one I don't believe that truly reaches out to the public to inform them. For me, this exemption that you increased last year, it was just automatically applied to the people that it applied to and they probably have no idea that they are receiving that benefit, that increased benefit but they're just gonna receive it because you changed the law. Our job is to enact the law and apply it appropriately and I'm not necessarily in full agreement with the Office of Policy and Management's interpretation of that law, but at the moment I've accepted it.

REP. BORER (115TH): What are you in disagreement about with their interpretation?

STEVE TOPLIFF: How it was applied. They made the interpretation that it was just \$500 dollars to each one and I, I just have a different interpretation than, I don't want to run them over on camera so. You're welcome.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any other questions? Senator Leone.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and good afternoon. I was out of the room but I was catching some of the testimony on CTN as I was trying to take care of something in the office and you had mentioned about the fact that the expansion for benefits to include for training only, and you mentioned how that would be an unfunded mandate to the towns. Have any other towns weighed in on this matter to this same degree or are there other towns in agreement with your interpretation?

STEVE TOPLIFF: You know I don't really know if they know how it will impact them. You know I just happen to, sorry, every year per your website, thank you for providing it, I do a keyword search and that's how I found these bills that just happened to be changing these statutes. I also put in exemption and a few other keywords cause I want to know how much you guys are gonna to give away through exemptions. I'm not sure. I talked to our association president yesterday about this and when it comes to veterans stuff, being a veteran, I'm passionate about it but a lot of assessors just say well we'll just do whatever we're told to do whereas I actually read it and interpret it, and being a member of the military, I understand what the language is that is being used.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you for that and I'll be curious and interested as other veteran organizations come before us to weigh in on this topic because you know we've always tried to follow the federal regulations cause if we try to do something outside that norm, even though for the best of intentions, then eventually it starts opening up many other issues that were unforeseen so I've been a little reluctant but I'm always open to new ways but I think you raise a valid point and again, I'll be interested as to what other organizations have to say about this 'cause it could, it could end up being more than what people think it is. Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. I do have a question. So my -- the intent of that bill from what I understand is not to completely change the definition of veteran. It's to expand access to the

license plates, college credit, and the driver's license so I guess is your, and if it's not drafted correctly now we can correct that drafting but with that intent, it wouldn't seem to me that it would impact a municipality.

STEVE TOPLIFF: I would just go back to what was the intent of changing 27-103 the last time we changed it because the unintended consequence to that was to remove the clause that said our allied forces being eligible for the exemption but whenever you change the language, it always expands eligibility. I am very, a stickler on what a veteran is and to me, a veteran is someone who served during a time of war that the Connecticut State Legislators determined was a period of war. I truly believe those people should have served on Title 10 status such as myself and many of these people sitting in this room, I understand, but those who serve now in the Connecticut National Guard since September 11, 2001, they have to train to the same standard, not that they hadn't before, but definitely now, but if the clause is in there since September 11, 2001, that would make sense because the operational tempo that they have, the National Guard, the full-time force truly relies on them to complete their mission but back in the 50's and some units were mobilized in the 50's for the Korean War but after that, the next time the National Guard, truly the reserves were mobilized was after September 11, 2001 and to, and most of them just joined either to get out of the service or to go to college and to me, that's not a veteran. And I was one of them. I joined the National Guard to go to college first and then I went full-time service and deployed to Desert Storm with the First Calv, go Calv, gotta get that in

there. I didn't go Army, Navy, but you know too many of us, defining what a veteran is, is a really important thing and to me, it's just not anybody that just wore the uniform cause yeah, okay, they might have served but in some of these cases, the way the bill is actually written would include somebody that joined the Army, went to basic training, and after 37 days, got discharged because they got hurt or they had a preexisting condition and they were relieved from duty and said you don't qualify for military service, but we're going to give you a general discharge. Under your bill, that's going to call that guy a veteran or woman, whoever it is, that person and that's not right. So that person would be truly, under the 27-103, that would be proposed, is a veteran and I don't think that's the intent of the legislature you know and the intent when you write the law is not important; it's what the words actually say and out of what is currently written, that would be unintended consequence in my opinion of that bill being passed the way it's written.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. So it seems, and I understand and I think we're going to hear other people who object to changing the definition of veteran but it seems that your objection is more to changing the definition than it is to the fiscal impact because of the way it's drafted and again, I guess that's debatable.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Well it's, yeah.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): There should not be a fiscal impact for municipalities.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Well it could be because if you expand the definition of a veteran then more people who serve would be eligible for the veterans' exemption and then therefore, it would be a fiscal impact to a municipality because you'll have more people receiving the veterans' exemption.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Thank you. Are there any other questions? Okay. Thank you very much for your testimony.

STEVE TOPLIFF: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next is Abigail Kassel.

ABIGAIL KASSEL: Good afternoon honorable co-chairs and members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a testimony on S.B. No. 217, AN ACT REQUIRING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE FOR EQUINE THERAPY FOR VETERANS. My name is Abigail Kassel and I am a social work graduate student from UConn interning at Ebony Horsewomen. Ebony Horsewomen is an equine assisted therapy nonprofit that serves the veteran population. I am here on behalf of Ebony Horsewomen in support of this bill with Patricia Kelly.

This bill that requires health insurance coverage for equine therapy services for veterans is crucial as it would increase access to an alternative service option that is promising in decreasing symptoms of PTSD, anxiety, and depression in veterans. According to the National Council for Behavioral Health, less than 50 percent of returning veterans in need receive any mental health treatment and approximately 22 veterans die by suicide every day. These numbers were staggering to me when I

first heard them and I feel they are an injustice to those who served our country.

I think it's important to share a little bit about the benefits of this kind of therapy, as it is a relevant and effective option for veterans. Equine Assisted Psychotherapy (EAP) is an experiential therapy proven to increase self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a positive identity, while decreasing depression and anxiety through work with horses. As an alternative to traditional therapy, Equine Assisted Therapy is especially successful with individuals who have experienced trauma. This is largely because of its nonverbal nature, which helps to reduce the anxiety or even distrust associated with speaking to a professional. From a personal perspective, I have seen the unique way in which clients interact with as well as build relationships and trust with horses. Horses act as mirrors throughout the healing process and provide nonjudgmental, instant feedback through hands-on, sensory filled sessions.

In summary, being around horses reduces stress and reminds one to be in the present moment. I urge you to support Senate Bill 217, a bill which supports access to this valuable form of therapy that fosters connection, self-awareness, and resiliency and I also want to state publicly that I agree with much of what Ms. Kelly said. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this topic and thank you to our veterans here today and in general for their service.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Are there any questions? Have you submitted your written testimony?

ABIGAIL KASSEL: Yes.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Great. Thank you. And, Ms. Kelly, did you submit your written testimony? Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony.

ABIGAIL KASSEL: Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next, Senator Formica. Senator Kelly? Okay. Daniel Eddinger.

DANIEL EDDINGER: Oh good morning or afternoon, I'm not sure which it is. I appreciate the opportunity. This is my first time here. My name is Daniel Eddinger. I am the Department of Connecticut Commander for the Military Order of the Purple Heart, retired Major from the United States Army, a Vietnam Veteran, and recipient of two Purple Hearts. On behalf of the Department of Military Order of the Purple Heart in Connecticut here, I am testifying in support of S.B. 220, AN ACT EXPANDING CERTAIN VETERANS ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

We feel it is our government's responsibility to take care of these veterans who were drafted and/or chose to serve our country during times of conflict. Many of the Veterans receive compensation because of service-connected injuries. This is not an income and should not be considered as additional income. A large number of veterans are living on the edge of existence, they earned the compensation they receive through service to our country. Considering benefits as additional income is the same as penalizing these veterans for serving our country. Public assistance is available to help those that need it and the veterans that have served honorably and receive

compensation for their service should not be penalized for their service. The Military Order of the Purple Heart is in support of S.B. 220. Open for questions.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Do any members of the Committee have questions? And so, so my understanding is that the issue comes down to it's, I believe it's between the Homebound and the Aid and Attendance? Is that --

DANIEL EDDINGER: Could be several of those type of issues. Just in getting a home alone, sometimes they'll say well what benefits do you have and they take that as additional income and it really should not be taken as additional income because assistance should be helpful, not hindrance.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Are there any other questions? If not, thank you for your testimony.

DANIEL EDDINGER: Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Next, Ronnie Lee Maebry. Did I pronounce your name correctly, sir?

RONNIE LEE MAEBRY: Good job.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you.

RONNIE LEE MAEBRY: Good afternoon, Senator Maroney, Veterans Service Committee and all the members here, my name is Ronnie Maebry, Sr. I'm the commander of the State DAV which is the Disabled American Veterans. We are located in Rocky Hill. I too am in support of S.B. 220. It greatly supported by the Disabled American Veterans. We realize the hardship this will place on all veterans in the State of

Connecticut if this earned benefit from pain suffering, for illness and injury from our tour of duty in the military is taken away. This compensation benefit should not be used as earned income. The majority of veterans in New Haven County and other counties are already living on the edge. If S.B. 220 is taken away, the majority of veterans living in public housing will no longer qualify for public assistance or public housing due to maybe a rent increase and would cause a great hardship for veterans living on the edge who are barely surviving.

So I ask this Committee to please keep in force Senate Bill 200 because it greatly helps veterans who have a fixed income. If you remove this compensation from them, it will put them in another tax bracket and that will cause them to pay higher rent or not be eligible for public housing. This ends my testimony. I thank you for your time and service and I welcome any questions.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any questions? While we have you here, do you have any opinions on any of the other bills that we've been discussing that you'd like to share with us?

RONNIE LEE MAEBRY: Yes. I am a recipient of quite a few, the tax abatement from my town, I live in the town of Hamden. With my DD214, it automatically qualifies me as a veteran who served during Iraq for that exemption. Also, each veteran who is a member of the VA Hospital, if you receive a compensation from the VA, you get an additional letter. That additional letter qualifies me for an additional abatement based on my income, because of my low income, your tax bracket is based on your low

income. If you're low income, your compensation would qualify you for additional tax abatement so in my town, I'm eligible for that. I personally feel that in regard to, let me get it correct now, right, in regard to the tax abatement which is, let me get it right here, excuse me, correct. In regard to that, I think that this bill should, this enactment through tax exemption, every veteran should be eligible for it. I think if you're serving your country and not due to your fault, if you go in and you get injured, whether you spent 90 days or something happened that was not your fault, I think you should be at least eligible for some type of tax abatement. If you got out of the military with an honorable discharge or a general discharge, I think you should qualify for at least the minimum. As I stated, in some towns they allow you additional tax abatement but if you serve your country and you was there for 90 days or 60 days, I served 30 years in the military. I retired as a United States Army Reservist, E8, I spent a tour in Iraq. I truly feel that just because you are National Guard or a Reservist, if the flag goes up, I went. I answered the call of duty. I don't think I should be discriminated because of the fact that I didn't serve five years or ten years or three years. I think everybody that raised their hand and served their country should be eligible for tax abatement.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you very much. Next, Matt Stillman.

MATT STILLMAN: Good afternoon. Thank you to the Chairman, the ranking members and the honorable members of the Veterans' Committee. My name is Matthew Stillman. I am an attorney, past president

of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys and am a member of the Executive Committee of the Connecticut Bar Association Elder Law Section. I am not going to read my testimony that I already submitted to this Committee. Respectively, you don't need to sit and watch me read written testimony but I'm going to make a brief statement regarding Senate Bill 220.

This bill aims to correct an error. It seeks to correct basically prior legislation which exempted all Aid and Attendance and pension benefits from income eligibility for applicable veterans which was then administratively changed by the Department of Social Services. The benefit in question is a medical reimbursement. It is not a special benefit. It is not extra income. It is a reimbursement for medical expenses for veterans or their surviving spouses who meet sufficient significant medical, have medical expenses, meet significant income and asset limitations. Under federal law it is exempt from counting as eligibility for social service programs under Social Security regulations, and the State of Connecticut Department of Social Services does not honor that. This bill again attempts to correct that wrong.

I'd like to thank Representative McCarty who earlier testified regarding Ms. Ellen DeGaetano's family. It was my office among others who I worked with who represented her family to resolve that issue. I will point out in that issue as with many other veterans and people in Connecticut who apply for social services that you must list your veteran's service on your application for social service benefits, and you are not allowed to opt out of it

so when the Department of Social Services sees that you are a veteran, you are essentially forced to apply for these benefits and upon receiving these particular benefits, the Aid and Attendance, you could essentially, like Ms. DeGaetano's family did, could essentially be disqualified because your income, your medical reimbursement is counted as income and that disqualifies you. My office and other attorneys working with that were able to resolve for her family but other Connecticut residents and the veterans like the fine people here, if you don't have an attorney essentially who can help you, who's familiar with that, they're at a significant redress.

So I'm happy to answer any questions regarding it. I do want to make one point though. Representative Vail in speaking earlier to Commissioner Saadi, you made the comment something to the effect that money that comes from the government that has a specific purpose should go for that purpose and the point of this particular benefit, it is a reimbursement for medical expenses to veterans and their spouses basically to avoid impoverishment and for the state to then count that money as income, as if it were a special income source, I think is wrong and it needs to be corrected so.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. Are there any questions from the Committee? So I do have a few questions. Now I believe part of this comes down to, and can you just clarify for me, it's the Aid and Attendance and the Homebound benefit.

MATT STILLMAN: That's correct, Senator.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): So you need to qualify, in order to get one, you have to first qualify for the other so.

MATT STILLMAN: Well, if I may, Senator. To qualify for this particular benefit which again, has significant medical, income and asset limitations, you must illustrate that you have significant medical need for assistance, the aid and attendance of others on a daily basis, that you cannot simply be living in the community. So you have to show that you have a medical need for help. Then there are significant asset limitations within the parameters of the program and then you have to illustrate that your income is being affected by this, that whatever you make in income, that you are paying money for medical expenses, not for rent, food, property taxes, gas, car, whatever, and that affects your ability to stay in the community. If someone basically was getting a certain amount of income, say \$2000 dollars a month and was only paying \$500 dollars a month for medical expenses, it would only be that \$500 dollars that comes into this calculation. People who are receiving this benefit are generally expending more money than they earn in medical expenses, nothing else, and that's what the purpose of this benefit is. It's to avoid impoverishment by veterans and their surviving spouses who are spending their money on medical expenses and that's the issue here that's to be addressed.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. And how have other states dealt with this? Was it New Jersey who sought a clarification? Can you expand on that?

MATT STILLMAN: There was a case in New Jersey, Vata [phonetic] versus Gelez [phonetic] basically and other states have dealt with it where their Department of Social Services has tried to attach these benefits and the federal government including the Center for Medicare Services have basically contacted the courts and instructed them that these reimbursements are not to be attached as income, that they are not to be considered income and that is also within Social Security regulations. Forty-five states in the country follow Social Security regulations on how they administer social services and basically, that specifically prevents or forbids calculation of medical reimbursement as income. Connecticut is not one of those 45 states, but basically, that is codified within the US Code and Code of Federal Regulations and the Social Security POMS, the regulations that run Social Security so. Did that answer your question?

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Yeah. And have you submitted any documents from that, the case in New Jersey that you mentioned as part of your testimony or could you submit them to the Committee?

MATT STILLMAN: I have not submitted anything from that court case in New Jersey as part of our testimony. We have inquired to the Clerk's office as well as to the attorneys who brought that case. We have not seen a response regardless of multiple inquiries so we can only provide what we receive. We have even signed onto the Federal Pacer System and have been unable to you know recite documents or provide those but as soon as we obtain them, we will provide them.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Great. Thank you very much. Are there further questions. Okay. Thank you.

MATT STILLMAN: Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you for your testimony. Next, Grace Dowling.

GRACE DOWLING: Good afternoon. My name is Grace Dowling and I am a high school senior from Suffield. I would like to thank the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, especially the Chair, Representative Borer, Senator Maroney, and Senator Vail for Raised Bill No. 5266, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GREEN ALERT SYSTEM FOR MISSING VETERANS.

I am an active member of the American Legion Auxiliary Post #36, in Windsor Locks. I serve as the Auxiliary's Sargent at Arms. Both of my grandfathers were veterans. I have close family friends and relatives who are veterans. I work with veterans through volunteer opportunities with the American Legion and the VFW. As part of my Civics course two years ago, I had an assignment that required us to undertake a project that would make a change in society. The change that I wanted was a reduction in the number of veteran suicides; I wanted to get a bill passed that did that. I read about the mother of a veteran in Wisconsin who was successful in having a Green Alert bill passed after her son, an at-risk vet, committed suicide. When she realized he was missing, she knew he was in danger. She contacted the police and filed a missing person report. He was not considered critical missing for eight days. Eighteen days later, his body was found; he had taken his life.

Had there been an immediate response, the outcome may have been different. She came up with the idea of a Green Alert, an alert system for at-risk veterans similar to the Amber Alert or a Silver Alert that we have in Connecticut. This seemed like a simple way to help reduce the number of veteran suicides. I brought this idea of a Green Alert to Senator Kissel, Representative Zawistowski, and former Representative Storms two years ago as my project. Last year, a similar bill was raised; I testified on it because this is an important issue. We are here this year because it didn't pass. I will be here every year this topic is raised, testifying on it, because it is so important and we need to solve this.

Connecticut has an Amber Alert and a Silver Alert that we know work. We need a Green Alert. We know the statistics on veteran suicide, every day an estimated 22 veterans kill themselves. If we start chipping at that number, it will go down. This will be a step in reducing that number. At-risk veterans in Connecticut, as a group, are as valuable as our children and the elderly. Veterans deserve a separate alert. Just as we separate children and the elderly, veterans should also be separated; including them as part of another alert does them a disservice. It minimizes their importance as an at risk group.

When an at-risk veteran goes missing, there is a probability that it will end in self-harm or death. This legislation is a nine line. Nine line is a medevac request for an injured soldier on the battlefield. The term symbolizes hope and trust in the soldier's community. We should provide hope to

them. They are part of our community and we value them. A Green Alert will go a long way to making a difference in the lives of not only the at-risk veterans, but also the friends, family, and community of our veterans. Thank you for your time. I'm open for questions.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Grace, thank you very much for your testimony. So mentioned Wisconsin has created a Green Alert. Have any other states followed suit? Uh, Representative Vail has a question for you.

GRACE DOWLING: Okay.

REP. VAIL (52ND): I had a question but Senator Maroney stole it but I just want to make a comment again. It's nice to see when our community gets engaged especially young people and so you gotta stay active, you gotta keep pushing. I'm certainly gonna try to help this along, get it to --

GRACE DOWLING: Thank you.

REP. VAIL (52ND): To the finish line but not always easy up here so again, just thank you for your advocacy and keep fighting and keep being loud and make sure you reach out to your politicians.

GRACE DOWLING: Thank you.

REP. VAIL (52ND): You're welcome.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Great. Thank you. Are there any other questions? If not, thank you very much for your testimony.

GRACE DOWLING: Thank you, Senator Maroney.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Okay. Next, Ray Laramie.

RAYMOND LARAMIE: Good afternoon Co-Chairmen, distinguished members of the committee. I'm Captain Ray Laramie. I'm the Connecticut Wing Standardization and Evaluation Officer and with me to my left here are Major General Jim Skiff, he's a former Air National Guard Commander and current Mission Pilot with the Civil Air Patrol, and Lieutenant Colonel Anthony Cichocki, who is also a former Air National Guard pilot and current Mission Pilot, instructor pilot, check pilot in Connecticut. We are appearing in support of proposed Senate Bill 219, AN ACT CONCERNING AN APPROPRIATION FOR THE CONNECTICUT WING CIVIL AIR PATROL. With your permission I'll read an abbreviated part of my testimony into the record and then we'd be happy to respond to your questions.

The Civil Air Patrol is the official auxiliary of the United States Air Force founded in 1941 as the country's first national civil air defense agency. It was made a part of the US Air Force in 1948 and then in 2015, was incorporated into the First Air Force as part of the Total Force concept. The organization is staffed by 66,000 civilian volunteers. These men and women operate 560 aircraft, over a thousand vehicles, and hundreds of pieces of communication equipment. We support not only the Air Force but also, through memorandums of understanding, state and local law enforcement, state emergency management, FEMA, the Red Cross, DHS, National Guard, and the Coast Guard in activities that serve state and local communities. In addition to community services, CAP educates young people in STEM and aerospace activities, molding future military and civil leaders. We do this through hands-on cybersecurity training,

robotics activities, powered and glider flight training, and programs that are focused on character development and leadership skills. For many of our cadets, this CAP experience is transforming, offering opportunities they would never have in any other format.

In Connecticut, the wing has 435 senior officers, adult members, and 425 cadets. Of these, 109 are pilots and aircrew, another 525 which is sort of a number nobody knows about, are trained emergency responders. There are 17 units throughout the state, 9 aircraft, 16 vehicles, and nearly 100 interoperable communications outlets and equipment. These resources support Long Island Sound Patrols from May through October, wintertime Ice Patrols over Connecticut's rivers and harbors. The value to the State of Connecticut last year is estimated to be approximately \$3.3 million dollars. Annually, CAP saves federal, state, and local governments more than \$120 million dollars. Nationally, CAP receives a very small portion of the federal military budget. In FY2019 this amounted to app \$52 million dollars, and this is the national figure, not the state allocation. In 2019, the Connecticut Wing had available only \$67,000 collars including \$12,000 dollars as its share of CAP NHQ monies with the rest from grants and some public donations. This amount is insufficient to properly support the wing's efforts in community service and cadet activities.

In the period 2009 to 2011, the Connecticut Wing routinely received an appropriations amounts from the legislature. However, after 2011, CAP was removed from budget considerations. Our appearance today is to request your support to return the

Connecticut Wing to the budget as a suitable and worthy recipient of state funds supporting state efforts. Any monies allocated by the state will be used to maintain assets and squadron facilities, many of which are badly in need of repair, to acquire aerospace related materials to educate and train young people. Also, to provide cadet scholarships to make possible attendance at CAP encampments and specialized training activities which, despite being subsidized by CAP, still have costs that many families in the state cannot manage. CAP does make a difference in the lives and futures of our young people. We make a valiant effort to operate within our small budget, but this appropriations request will return dividends to the state and to its residents. A national study found that for every dollar invested in CAP, the recipient of their services receives \$4 dollars in benefits. This is a significant return on investment. Accordingly, we urge you to include the Connecticut CAP Wing in your budget planning this year. Thank you for your kind attention and we would be happy to take your questions at this time.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you and I just wanted to explain that I do apologize. We did move Mr. Laramie up in the order because the students who are with him do have to leave and I also would apologize to Grace. In other Committees, we do allow separate signups for students, recognizing that you often have to get back home and so I do apologize, we moved you back but would you mind introducing the students who are here with you?

RAYMOND LARAMIE: I'd like to have them introduce themselves if I may?

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Actually for purposes of time, if you wouldn't mind just introducing them quickly?

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Mr. Chair, if you wouldn't mind just having the boys come up so we can all just see a picture of them up there. They are here in uniform and as a matter of fact, one of the young men over there was at Boy State last year when I went to there. It would be nice if we could just give the boys a minute.

RAYMOND LARAMIE: And we have one young lady.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): One young lady, I'm sorry. Thank you.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. As a former Boy State member, I, yeah.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Yep, that's what we want.

RAYMOND LARAMIE: Okay. Let me introduce them. I'll go left, my left, this is First Lieutenant, Jonathan Bell and Second Lieutenant, I'm going to get this right, Joshua Bell. This is Cadet Davis, Cadet Srinavastava [phonetic], Cadet Christie, and Cadet Tan.

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you. [Applause].

RAYMOND LARAMIE: I should point out that Cadet Jonathan Bell is sitting on three pending appointments to all three military academies so [Applause].

SENATOR MARONEY (14TH): Thank you and I think we should also thank the American Legion for running the Boys State Program which is a tremendous program

and we have heard and will hear from them. Are there any questions? Representative Boyd?

REP. BOYD (50TH): Thank you all for coming up and participating. You may or may not know this answer. At the time that the funding was pulled back you said in 2011, is that the last time that there was funding in the state budget?

RAYMOND LARAMIE: As far as I know, yes.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Did we at the same time have a subsidy to let's say the Coast Guard Axillary at the time and is there anything on parody with the other auxiliaries that exist within the military? You may not know and it's unfair to ask you that but I figured [crosstalk].

RAYMOND LARAMIE: I honestly don't know the answer to that. My association with CAP began in 2015.

REP. BOYD (50TH): Sure, sure. I think that's worth kind of looking at the whole picture of, you know, cause I'm fully supportive of the fact that our civilian organizations across the board are a huge part of our emergency management plan in the State of Connecticut and civil defense and that kind of stuff and it should kind of be looked at in that realm as well so anyway, thank you for coming up and thank you, Madam Chair.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you to all of you for coming up today. Nice job. Oh, I'm sorry. Hold on. Senator Leone.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Captain, for coming and of course, I thank the students for taking time out of their busy schedule which is not just high school, but you know

military as well so I want to thank everyone here for their service. I've been a staunch defender of the Civil Air Patrol, being an Air Force veteran myself, and I know from the history what the auxiliary division has done for our state and I'm sure other auxiliaries do as well but I am a proponent of reinstating some of the funding because I know that not just the leadership qualities that you bring to your cadets and what their lives and their maturity brings to the table as they grow and become their own leaders in our world. I think Connecticut is at a disservice if we don't fund these type of programs because then we are at a disadvantage of other states that do and if other organizations or other state agencies or federal agencies don't pick up the gap, then we suffer even more because then the mission doesn't get accomplished and it's for a lot of those reasons why I've submitted testimony on behalf of the Civil Air Patrol for our membership. I am also happy to state that we in the Senate were, I think we're the only state now for a few years now that has every Senate member as a member for the Civil Air Patrol so that we can educate not just ourselves and our colleagues, but the public because I think it's been a well-kept secret for so long, no one understood or knows what it is that you do or what your students and your cadets do. The fact that the mission is being accomplished by high school level kids that want to be something more as they grow older is something that we should all be proud of and I wish more, quite frankly, more students would do that and I'm sure that there's quite a few but I think if they understood and saw what their capabilities are and could be for those that are not involved, maybe

you would get even more members. So for those reasons and probably so many more and just from a sense of pride, I'm in full support. I hope my colleagues will see the merits of this. There's always budget constraints and so we may not always get what we want, but if we can restore the line item, I think that would go a long way and then I would ask you and your members and your cadets as well that you continue to educate my colleagues and members of the legislature and members of the community what it is that you do because again, it's been too well-kept a secret for long because it was assumed that it was always gonna be here and that might not be the case if we don't fund it. So I just wanted to make those welcome comments and again, thank you for everything that you do and thank you for coming up here to advocate on your behalf. Thank you, Madam Chair.

RAYMOND LARAMIE: And thank you, Senator Leone. I appreciate that very much.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Okay. Next up, I believe Senator Formica and Senator Kelly are coming up together? We passed over them. They were on the list first and we called their name and they weren't here. We alternate the list. We do constituent and then member of the public and then a legislator and then a member of the public and then a legislator so we just had members of the public and then we do legislators. Okay? And then Ernestine will be next. Thank you, gentlemen.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Good afternoon. Thank you very much, Representative Borer, Senator Logan, Representative Boyd, Representative Vail, thank you for the opportunity to come and testify in support

of Senate Bill 220. Senator Kelly and I are in favor of this bill and we put it forward in the past and we hope that this year, it will find a way. The bill seeks to remove barriers to public assistance programs for Connecticut's veterans. We know that you have a very busy day and I'm going to ask Senator Kelly if he would just go to the specific details of the bill and then we can move your day along. Thank you very much.

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Good afternoon, Chairwoman Borer, Representative Vail, Representative Boyd, Senator Logan, members of the Veterans' Committee. Basically what this bill does is that a few years back, we exempted what was known as an Aid and Attendance benefit that helps our veterans age in place and so DSS, as part of the public assistance eligibility process not only exempts that income, but it also requires veterans applying for assistance to make an application for those benefits. In order to qualify, you also have to qualify for what's known as a veterans' pension which also adds income. It's kind of like a Venn diagram, the pension income is the big box and Aid and Attendance is a circle within the box. What that oftentimes does is that the added income that they're required to apply for, makes them ineligible for the very assistance that they are seeking to get so that they can age in place and we think that's unfair because we've already made the public policy, I'm going to say statement that the underlying Aid and Attendance should be exempt. Well if that's the case, then so should the entire pension income and so we want to give our veterans the opportunity to age in place. Most people don't want to go to a nursing home. They recognize that aging at home is

less expensive and arguably better after so much of what they've given for us, this is a little modicum of decency that we can provide to them.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Do we have any questions? Okay. So I would just say we had a few others that testified on this prior to the two of you and I will just repeat what I had said to them, that this bill's come up in the past. It's an important bill. We need to get this right. We need to allow them to stay in their homes. I have gone back to DSS on this issue. They have indicated that I'm incorrectly calculating you know how the income is calculated, how it's counted in so and then Senator Maroney and I also met with the Elder Attorneys this summer to try to get our arms around this. I think we need to sit in a room and hammer this out and I think it would be really important to have specific live examples so that we can walk those through with DSS and we can really demonstrate to them that what they may believe is happening is not happening. Does that make sense?

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Certainly it makes sense and to that extent, I would be more than willing to work with this Committee to make sure that we get it right for our veterans.

REP. BORER (115TH): And if it's supposed to be done that way, do we need to legislate it? I mean is it just an interpretation of existing rules that were just mis-, maybe DSS is misinterpreting or do we have to change the legislation?

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): That's a very interesting question because we already exempt the Aid and Attendance and this is a requirement that you have

to do in order to get that benefit. DSS is bifurcating it. In my opinion that's kind of administrative but they aren't following the legislation as it was passed so you know I think a meeting and looking at the details would probably be the best way to approach this and maybe we can get to a mutually beneficial area.

REP. BORER (115TH): Sure. No, I was just gonna say that's a great idea because we could pass another legislative, we can pass more legislation but if we have different ideas of how this should be applied, I'm not so sure that that would be the most productive way.

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Right. At the end of the day we want you know DSS to work with us.

REP. BORER (115TH): Correct. I agree. Yes, Representative Vail?

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Madam Chair and good afternoon Senators. So the legislation that was passed, so the intention of the original legislation was that all those things would not be counted and that DSS is making their own interpretation that is different from what the legislative intent is or am I looking too deep into this?

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Well the Aid and Attendance benefit is a subset of veteran's pension. Okay, so when you ask a veteran to apply for Aid and Attendance, they also have to apply for a VA pension too okay so that's additional income and what DSS is doing is saying that the Aid and Attendance is exempt, but that additional is not.

REP. VAIL (52ND): But that wasn't the intention originally, correct?

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Well it initially it was that veterans should apply for this Aid and Attendance cause it's also, getting this benefit helps veterans stay in the community. When people stay in the community, that avoids institutionalization and institutional public assistance is about three times the cost of community-based services so the Aid and Attendance is actually a benefit to the State of Connecticut and DSS's budget by keeping people at home. So that was the concept. Now, that was the clear intent but I think what's happening is we're getting a little bit too granular in looking at well in order to get that you have to apply for something larger in that little piece extra may make a veteran ineligible because they now exceed in income cap.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. So again, I'm always about trying to keep things out of legislation but it seems to me maybe, do we need legislation to really lay things out for DSS to do things the right way so that doesn't happen? Is that the intention of this or do we really kind of leave that in the hands of the bureaucrats?

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Well I think what this bill does is it demonstrates that there is an issue that needs to be addressed. Certainly if we can do this in an administratively efficient manner, I think that would be preferable, but if it requires legislation, we have the groundwork and the vehicle in order to do that because at the end of the day, whether it's legislative or administrative, we want to help our veterans.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So it's helpful for this to keep moving forward this way unless something gives the other way, non-legislatively in the meantime.

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): [Crosstalk] DSS attention.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. Good. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. Anybody else? Thank you very much, gentlemen. And I will set that meeting up myself. Okay. Next we have Reverend Ernestine Holloway and I'm just going to; we are done with the legislative list. We only have public for the rest of the list but we have quite, still a number of speakers to go so I'm just going to remind everybody about the three-minute threshold and I'm going to ask our Clerk to make sure you let us know when those three minutes are up. Thank you. Can you press the button and so we can because we're being filmed and then they'll catch your voice?

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Hello. My name is Reverend Ernestine Holloway. I'm the Vice-President of CTRA and I'm also the head Refuge Temple Council of Churches and Serenity House, Inc. where I'm the CFO. I'm here today because I also run a food pantry and a lot of people that come to my food pantry are veterans. I also look at their paperwork when they are applying to DSS. I don't know if the rocks work for DSS and I'm trying to be nice about it. I think that they're doing more harm for vets. I see them come out so angry, so frustrated and having to pull them together and say we gotta do this. It doesn't work. Yes, they do need legislation cause they don't seem to be listening to the rules. I read it. It's kind of simple to me. You don't add that income in because if you do, it's

gonna be too much and they won't be qualified. It doesn't take a rock scientist to figure that out.

I also have issues with them when it comes to medical transportation, VHO. I don't know who trained them people but I think they make the rules up as they go. What was supposed to happen was 169 towns were supposed to be on a board and on this board, when things happen in your city and your town, those people represent you. So when they did the switch from LogistiCare over, they didn't bring the board over so now we don't have say so in what they do and for veterans this is very hard. If you don't have PTSD, you will after dealing with VHO, I promise you, you will. I don't understand something and to the veterans my heart goes out to you and thank you for your service. Why are we taking so long to exempt them from things that they shouldn't have to pay for? They gave their life, their heart, their body, and their soul. Why is this so difficult? We give every foreigner that comes into this country that's not entitled to any of this, but we have a hard time giving it to them. That doesn't make sense to me.

So I looked at the thing from Medicare and I went down the list and exempting veterans from the Passport to the Parks, the motor vehicle registration, you know concerning special registration markers and plates for them. These are things that they should get automatically. It's a no-brainer. Why can't they stay in their homes? It's cheaper any doggone way. If we're saying we don't have money, why aren't we doing the things that's just simple logic? We need to take care of our own and they are our own. They gave their life

so that we could have some of the benefits so why is this an issue? DSS is micromanaging what they do. You get one supervisor that says yes, we cannot do this, we cannot add this money. Then you get one supervisor that says yes, we must add the money because guess what? I go down there with them. I never say who I am until they get kind of crazy and then I'm like I don't think you want to do that.

So do you need a meeting with them? Absolutely. And not only that, the municipalities need to do their part also. There needs to be an office in the municipalities that they can go to and say I need help. Who do you point me to? I think we have too many of them homeless. I don't understand that either and I'm going to say that, why not take those factories that are empty, cause they have the skills anyway, let them rebuild it, bond it, turn it into single home occupancies, let the rent pay for the bond and the other part of the bond pay for medical staff to be in the building. It's a simple, I don't understand why it's so damn complicated. So let's help them so that they don't be homeless cause it bothers me when I gotta bring them hot food or a blanket and a pair of shoes cause they underneath the bridge or in the train station with nowhere to go.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for how much you care. You testified last year, right?

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Yes.

REP. BORER (115TH): I remember. Thank you for all your caring for the veterans and you're absolutely right, there's so much more we can always do and you touched on a lot of points that hopefully we'll be

looking at during this legislative session. With specific to VHO I know that there was a separate workshop to look at their contract and their service so I know that that is being done in another committee so you'll be happy to know cause I think we've all had some challenges with that.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Okay. I'd like to know that committee cause I'd like to put my two cents in.

REP. BORER (115TH): I don't know but if you leave your name and number with the Clerk, we will get that information to you. Okay? Thank you so much.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Absolutely. Thank you for hearing this issue.

REP. BORER (115TH): Human Services is the Committee.

REVEREND ERNESTINE HOLLOWAY: Okay.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yep. Thank you so much for coming. Oh, did anybody have any questions? I'm sorry. Okay. Thank you. Next up we have Daniel Thurston.

DANIEL THURSTON: Good afternoon Representative Borer, members of the Veterans Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon. I'm Dan Thurston, Chairman for the Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition. I have submitted my written testimony and I'd just like to summarize a few points.

We support of Senate Bill 218 recognizing citizens who served honorably in the National Guard or Armed Forces Reserve. We also support Senate Bill 220,

exempting veterans' pension benefits, which has been discussed at length this afternoon. We also support 5262 in principle to create new license plates for veterans who served during specified periods of wartime. I understand the intent of the bill is to recognize and honor the veterans for their wartime service, but then a more appropriate symbol should be used and as has been discussed before, using the combat service ribbon. I kind of came to this conclusion when I kind of thought back on some Bataan survivors that I had met and kind of contemplated what they might think to have a Japanese flag on their marker.

The main thing I wanted to discuss is that we are opposed House Bill 5266 incorporating a Green Alert System for veterans in the existing statue. My main concern with this bill is the unnecessary focus on the missing person as a veteran. I understand that the families have concerns regarding the issue of PTSD and the higher suicide rate amongst veterans verses the general population and that there is an urgency to locate the missing veteran. As I understand it, the bill would change the existing statue to include missing veterans and exempt them from the wait time requirement for the filing of a missing person report. That's a good thing. Other parts of the bill would add a missing veteran in the provision of section 29-1f that currently applies exemption to a missing person who is 18 years of age or older or has a mental impairment. This provision requires that law enforcement agencies are provided with information necessary to assist in the location and identification of the missing person such as physical features, age, last known location, time. Just the fact that the missing person is an adult

and has been missing for less than the required wait time can identify them as a veteran or a person with a mental impairment. The information, when made public, can have a negative and unintended consequence. For the purpose of providing assistance for the veteran and families, it should be considered that an otherwise healthy missing veteran is a veteran in crisis. I do not know how to briefly convey an understanding of the experiences that members of our Armed Forces encounter in service to this nation. It often takes many years to accept that these traumatic experiences are a part of who we are. The vivid images, the sounds, the smells, they linger. They do not stop when we are discharged. We carry them throughout our lives.

A veteran struggling to adjust to civilian life does not need to be associated or labeled as mentally unstable. The transition from military to civilian life can be traumatic in itself. A media news story associating you with a euphemistic label that infers that you are mentally unstable could be the final straw. The Iraqi and Afghanistan Veterans of America have suggested the use of the Texas' Camo Alert or the Veterans Crisis Line. I was hoping they would be here today to add to this. I'm more familiar with the Veterans Crisis Line --

REP. BORER (115TH): Mr. Thurston, I'm going to have to ask you to wrap up your testimony to allow for others to speak.

DANIEL THURSTON: Okay. I'm at the last paragraph. The Veterans Crisis Line that has professional staff and are knowledgeable on veterans' issues and can adapt to individual circumstances. Establishing a

channel of communication with an organization that has the resources to assist the family while protecting and helping the veteran should be a worthy goal of this legislation. On behalf of the veterans of Connecticut, thank you for your time and I'm here for questions.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you. Does anybody have any questions? Well thank you for testifying. I know you always come forward and testify and thank you for bringing up the point about the Green Alert System. I think it's a good program but those challenges have been stated before and I know that there's some reservations there so thank you for providing that perspective and we'll as a committee discuss that.

DANIEL THURSTON: Like I said, the main thing is when a veteran goes missing, not for the same reasons an Amber Alert is called out for instance, you know and personal experience tells me that the window to locate the veteran and help them is very short.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great. Thank you. Anybody else? Well thank you, thank you for coming. Okay. Next, we have Brian Burrridge.

BRIAN BURRIDGE: Good afternoon. My name is Brian Burrridge. I am the Veterans' Representative in the Town of East Lyme. I am here to voice my support of Senate Bill 220 which would expand veterans' eligibility for assistance programs. I see myself as a hall monitor dealing with veterans' issues. I am the point of contact for veterans and their families when they have questions or concerns about where to turn for assistance. Many of the members

of the veteran community are of advanced age and homebound. Many find that their financial resources have dwindled and they are seeking ways to supplement their limited incomes. Many need help with daily living skills so that they can remain at home. They often have significant needs for personal healthcare assistance.

The Aid and Attendance Act was meant to assist veterans in these situations by reimbursing them for some of the costs they are incurring. I am not going to repeat what Attorney Stillman said or the senator said cause it's just the importance of it, but as the veterans' representative, I get calls and 90 percent of them I can answer by saying you need to talk to this person, you need to talk to this person. There's 10 percent where I need to go there physical. I picked up a veteran two weeks ago four times off the floor when he fell because he's alone and nobody else could do it. He passed away last Thursday. There are many emotions that I as a veterans' representative cannot answer and one of the calls is the financing of veterans with health issues. This is where the Aid and Attendance would help them if they knew about it.

My name is out for them to contact me on these issues. There was a question about advertisement. East Lyme has a veterans' coffee house and the idea is veterans getting together talking about veterans' issues. Would you please pass these around? I would like support for Senate Bill 220 because of the issues that I deal with concerning veterans on a daily basis. There is other information available to veterans cause every organization has outreach for each veteran. Right now this is something that

is passionate to me because there are many veterans reaching out. I can give some of them help, but some I cannot. Thank you. I will answer any questions I can.

REP. BORER (115TH): Any questions? I want to thank you for coming forward. I know that when we came to Rocky Hill and spoke with a lot of the veterans that your town and your service was a model for other towns and cities and how veterans' services work in that city.

BRIAN BURRIDGE: Thank you. I like hearing that. I don't get much feedback but thank you. I appreciate that.

REP. BORER (115TH): Yes and it is our hope that a lot of other municipalities will disseminate information and make [crosstalk].

BRIAN BURRIDGE: Thames Valley Council Community Action sponsors right now in Southern Connecticut nine veteran coffee houses, all of them with the same principle, have a guest speaker, talk about veteran issues and then veterans getting together and talking with other people that are not part of the VA system, but interested in veterans' issues.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's great. That's a good model. Yes, Senator.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much. I have a question on the veterans' coffee houses which I've been to the one in Norwich, another good coffee house, but I've noticed that sometimes you have people, and I'm just curious, if you are having people hang around that are not veterans that are sort of taking advantage of the situation to

associate themselves with veterans. Are you, do you have that problem in [crosstalk]?

BRIAN BURRIDGE: I myself don't but my veterans' coffee spouse invites spouses and caregivers of veterans because they do need to be aware of veteran issues.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Yeah, I would agree with that wholeheartedly because spouses and caregivers should be there but not ancillary people that themselves are not veterans and they have no association as a caregiver or a family member per se.

BRIAN BURRIDGE: I will disagree with that because I have invited, not as guest speakers, but people that show interest. I'll give you an example, Work Vessels for Veterans. They are not caregivers, they are not related, but they have high interest in veteran issues. There's also the High Hopes, that's the equestrian therapy. They too are not veteran-directed, but interested in veterans' issues.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): I just don't want to see; you know I'm a veteran.

BRIAN BURRIDGE: Yes, I do and thank you for your service.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you for yours but I just don't want to see people take advantage of veterans by associating themselves in an unnecessary way. You know what I mean? I think sometimes, I think we have to be cautious of that piece of it, that in particular as someone gets older, if they think that the person is associated with the veterans' coffee houses or associated with veterans' organizations that they are themselves a veteran or

themselves somebody that is doing work for veterans and I just caution people to be on alert for that because I don't want to see people get taken advantage of.

BRIAN BURRIDGE: I appreciate your concern and you do have a point, but I have noticed with the veterans' coffee houses that I attended in the comradeship okay, sea stories, you can tell when somebody's got an experience that is real to life versus somebody that's working out of his imagination. The comradeship, you know people telling stories where they've been there, done that.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you. I just am a little - -

BRIAN BURRIDGE: Very good concern.

SENATOR OSTEN (19TH): Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

BRIAN BURRIDGE: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you again. Our next speaker is, let me see I get this right, Taqueline? Oh, Jacqueline. Geez. Okay. Oh you're both from Ray of Light? Okay. Thank you.

CATHY LANGUERAND: Thank you. My name is Cathy Languerand, and I'd like to thank this Committee, the VA Affairs Committee for the opportunity to be heard concerning purposed Senate Bill 217. To keep it simple, a lot has already been spoken about it so I don't want to repeat it. I live at Ray of Light Farm in East Haddam, Connecticut and I am attending today as part of the Veterans Equestrian Therapy Services Coalition with Foxfield F.A.R.M. and the Horse Feathers Program at Ray of Light Farm. I

joined my voice with Susan and Bill Regan to educate as many as possible about offering Equine Wellness Therapy as an alternative option for veterans.

I have lived and been a voter here in Connecticut my entire life. I am a lifelong horse professional with over 40 years of experience. I am certified with many different certifications as a Master Instructor on all equine subjects concerning riding, driving, behavior, bio-mechanics, nutrition, and equine assisted therapies. In addition, I am a Reiki Master and teacher working at that level of how things feel. I combine this alternative therapy with the horse work to benefit both horses and humans. I'm the daughter of a veteran, the sister of a veteran, the wife of a veteran, and friend to many veterans. I've lived with the symptoms of PTSD in my home my for many years without understanding or solutions. I came to understand that horses teach by showing who they are. Horses are empathic sentient beings who share mental, emotional, and physical wellness. I learned to partner with the horses from this unique perspective in order to serve the veterans more fully. I share how the horses communicate with us through their body language, communicating a feeling of safety, trust, and respect. Even communication between humans is 93 percent nonverbal. Feelings and unspoken communication can be difficult to measure, but as we learn the science of noticing how we feel physically, mentally, and emotionally, we are getting better at putting our findings into words and measurable outcomes.

I shared a Thanksgiving dinner at the farm with four veterans who live at the Rocky Hill and this helped

me to see more clearly how I can be of service. Even with very little to be thankful for, these people were generous, funny, compassionate and had a love for life. This group just blew me away and it helped to push me out of my comfort zone and to convince me to reach out into my community for additional ways to be of service. That's what brought me here today.

I'm partnering with Susan and Bill and coming here today and joining community groups at home and on a national level has become part of what I do. Yes, you can say that by working the veterans have become my teachers, not only the horses. A true partnership with horses demands 100 percent accountability in what you do, what you say, and how you feel. I am here today to be 100 percent accountable to the veterans that I've served. I need to feel that I've done everything I could to be of service to them. I'm tired of hearing the veterans tell me why they want to die and I'm tired of having no solutions. I hope that the information we're able to provide will inspire you to be 100 percent accountable in doing everything you could possibly do to provide the veterans with support that meets all their needs, physically, mentally, and emotionally and that does no harm. I have the deepest respect for all the work that you all do here and I am grateful for this opportunity to give a voice to the voiceless and answer any questions that you have.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you and thank you for all you do and all your caring for our veterans. Any questions? Yes, Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Thank you, Madam Chairperson. Good afternoon. Are there any insurance policies that do cover this like electively? Cause I know it's certainly not mandated through the Affordable Care Act and beyond.

CATHY LANGUERAND: No, not unless you have a doctor that writes a prescription to like a psychiatrist or psychologist and so it would have to go through a doctor.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So there's a path but it's not an easy one?

CATHY LANGUERAND: No. And it's certainly not, I'm not a therapist so the horses do the therapy so this is, there's no mental or emotional connotations with our work on paper right? So the horses are assisting in regulating, emotionally and mentally regulating and rewiring the trauma that is served and we do have, we work with a mental health professional with our group but it's not considered therapy. It's a wellness program and it lowers stress.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So what other forms -- so if someone didn't have the ability financially to get this type of therapy, are there other ways that they would be able to supplement payment like other groups that help pay for this or is there anything else? What do you do in that situation?

CATHY LANGUERAND: So we have funded this program completely ourselves for the last five years as basically any of the other groups that you heard from today, we get, we run fundraisers and we support the group. It's a bigger problem than that. We can only put our toe in the water to solve the

problem. We're looking for something, the support and the understanding from the community that this is a viable solution to mental and emotional trauma.

REP. VAIL (52ND): How many equine therapy places are there in Connecticut?

CATHY LANGUERAND: So one of my, I'm a, PATH is Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship. There are at least 12 that are accredited and there are probably 20. Not all of them work with veterans and not all of them do work with mental and emotional. Some of them just focus on the physical act of sitting on a horse and riding so our program, the programs that we've been talking about here deal with trauma of PTSD and more unmounted programs. I'm not sure whether you sit on a horse or not sit on a horse is the issue. It's that you're looking at the benefits to be mental, emotional and physical and a balanced overview of everything. That's the push for what we're talking about. Even when we talk about suicide, you know we have the suicide hotlines and we talk about how are you feeling and that's the most important thing that we do. The actual time with the horse could be to just go sit with them. There's no one thing that happens. Our group of veterans decided to grow a garden. You know in the winter we have baby guinea pigs. They sit with the guinea pigs. There's no one thing that we do that provides relief from the stress of the trauma that they have in their lives.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Do you strictly work with veterans?

CATHY LANGUERAND: No, any population.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Again, so there's other populations that also experience PTSD like law enforcement.

CATHY LANGUERAND: Yeah, so first responders.

REP. VAIL (52ND): And, yeah, so again, and I sit on the Insurance and Real Estate Committee so I will see how that bill comes before us but because -- if you're gonna make a mandate then maybe you have to kind of include everybody. All right. Thank you for your input.

CATHY LANGUERAND: Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): That's a good point, Representative. Thank you very much for your testimony and thank you for your patience.

CATHY LANGUERAND: Thank you for allowing us to have a voice.

REP. BORER (115TH): Of course. Our next speaker is Sherri Vogt.

SHERRI VOGT: Thank you. Thank you very much. So I just want to go a little off of my notes although I have submitted testimony. I am a United States Army veteran. I proudly wear my Connecticut Wartime Service Medal. I love Connecticut and I will always call it home. In reference to who can benefit from equine therapy, my daughter is on the autistic spectrum and I can tell you that there are many, many groups of people that can benefit. PTSD is something that is prevalent in the civilian population, you know whatever the trauma is, a horrible car accident, sexual trauma and yes, those that respond so I just wanted to add that.

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Also, the bills about the cemetery, the veterans' cemetery, when we talk about funding I talk about the veterans' cemetery every day at work. I work for Hartford Healthcare at home and I visit veterans in hospice and I can tell you that when they know that the spouse and the veteran are eligible to be forever there, we need to take into account perpetual care. So we need to know that we made a promise as we did after the Civil War to take those care of those that are resting in our Connecticut cemeteries.

Today I'm here to discuss and support Senate Bill 220. Before I had my job with Hartford Healthcare as one of their veteran liaisons, I had worked for Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty. I was in the New Britain office where I received thousands, thousands of calls over the six years from veterans who needed help to cut through red tape and let me tell you that there are veterans who struggle every day to make ends meet and they are not always our veterans that are receiving Aid and Attendance. Those are some of our older veterans that are receiving Aid and Attendance, an additional VA pension. We have veterans that might look perfectly healthy and let me tell you, they are not. A service-connected disability, the invisible wounds of war, the invisible wounds of service because let's remember, not every wound is due to combat. We have those that struggle with the aftermath of military sexual trauma. We have those that have training accidents. You can be injured in basic training as one of my fellow females at Fort Dix New Jersey. She had a broken hip, right, so service-connected disability

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is service-connected, not just a combat wound and I would like to make that clear.

So when we have veterans that return home and they live in a state where it's a little more expensive to live, we cannot have their compensation which by definition is not income. The IRS knows that it is not income. By definition, compensation is used as a recompense for loss, injury or suffering and on that note, I thank you very much for this very important bill coming before you. I look forward to seeing it voted on and signed into law.

REP. BOYD (50TH): And I want to thank you for your service. I've seen you in action at a lot of the veterans' events and you truly have, you're truly caring and you do a great job and I'd love to see you down in my town soon.

SHERRI VOGT: Absolutely.

REP. BORER (115TH): I think Representative Boyd has a questions or comment?

REP. BOYD (50TH): I just want to thank you for everything that you do. The energy that you bring to veterans' services and any job that you've held and I've seen you in a lot of different ones is inspiring and the Committee appreciates it and everything that you do so I just wanted to say thank you.

SHERRI VOGT: Absolutely and it was one of your veterans in your district, Sarah Hamby, who inspires me to make sure that we get it right. It is a promise we made to all of the people that raise

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their hand to protect and defend the Constitution.  
Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Okay. Our next speaker is Dave Greene. Is Dave still here? Oh, that's too bad. Okay. Robert Priest? Oh. Kathy Flaherty. Okay. Thanks, Kathy.

KATHY FLAHERTY: Representative Borer and members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, my name is Kathy Flaherty and I'm the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project, also a co-chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition and a member of the steering committee of the Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance. I'm not usually here before this Committee but the folks from the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America reached out to me about this bill and asked me to come and support their position and it is an honor to have been asked to do that.

I understand that the intention behind 5266 is good, but it's the execution and the implementation that matters, and it's the unintended consequences of this that matter. And I know you've been here a long time and I have to run up to Finance, Revenue and Bonding so I'm just happy to answer any questions that you might have, but rejecting it as it's proposed right now.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great. Thank you and thank you for representing them today. Representative Vail.

REP. VAIL (52ND): So would you agree that the concept is good and if so, what would you do, what could we do to change it that would alleviate your concerns?

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KATHY FLAHERTY: I think we already have an existing setup of alerts in this state to have law enforcement know that they are looking for somebody. I am convinced that assigning everybody in every different group a different color is helpful. What particularly concerns me when we're talking about veterans is the way that it's implemented when it says you know don't approach, call law enforcement. People may not be aware that half the people who die in encounters with law enforcement are people with disabilities. A lot of them are people with mental illness so again, I think the intention is good of saying let's call law enforcement, let's everybody know, but if you look at what, the fact sheet that IAVA gave, it's like basically broadcasting somebody's mental health condition to the entire state in an alert. It's just really not a good idea because once it goes out, it's out there forever and when they want to go for a future job, if they want to have a relationship with something, that's gonna be the first thing that's probably gonna come up in a Google search of their name and that's why they don't want it and they're telling you they don't want it so I would just say, listen to them.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Well they're all not telling us that. There's two sides to that story. So is there a way we could do it that would not stigmatize them as a mental health person, just say this is someone that's missing? I'm asking you. So you're just opposed to it. You have no solutions how to make it better.

KATHY FLAHERTY: No, I think the solution is you already have silver alerts. You don't really need

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to have a green alert for veterans. I mean you don't need to have a different, that's one of the things. It's like we have a missing person, here's the emergency broadcast alert, help us find this person. We don't need a separate system so that people know, and this kind of came up last year with the blue frame on the license plates to identify people who are autistic and it was like people wanted to help people to make sure that those interactions with law enforcement went better, but didn't think through that every time an autistic individual who signed up for this program showed their license, and people show their licenses in lots of different situations. That was a problem so they changed it. I do think that the folks from IAVA gave some detailed testimony about how things work in other states where it is a truly voluntary opt in. Like if the veteran, him or herself says, you know I'm concerned about my safety down the line, if something happens to me, here, my local police department you know that, you know Connecticut's such a small state and even if it's geographically limited to where the veteran could reasonably go, I think we all know Connecticut's small enough that that's really gonna be a statewide broadcast. I just, my concern usually is who are the people who are gonna be most impacted and you're right, there are two sides, but I think it has to be very carefully crafted and I just ask you to think through how you design it if you are gonna do it and I just don't think it's necessary.

REP. VAIL (52ND): Okay. That's what I was trying to get at. So you're just opposed to it. I didn't

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know if you had suggestions to make it better. All right. Thank you.

REP. BORER (115TH): Thank you for your testimony and your testimony. Thank you. Next up is Chris Paulchus? No? He's not here either? Okay. Last but not least, Thomas Burke. Well then I guess that concludes our public testimony and I want to thank everybody for their attendance today. Anybody else that didn't sign up? Oh, okay, sure, come on up. We have a few minutes. And since you're not on the signup sheet, can you give your name for the record, please?

MARVIN SERRATO: Marvin Serrato, 100 Star Street, Norwich, Connecticut, United States of America. I'm a US Navy submarine veteran and I just wanted to come here and speak in favor of Senate Bill 220 and I'll be brief. That's it. I can't speak for any of the organizations. I do belong to a number of them but I can't speak for them. All I can say is many of my friends and family are in favor of Senate Bill 220 and I thank you very much for your time.

REP. BORER (115TH): Great and I'm glad you came up and gave your testimony. Thank you. We appreciate it and I want to thank everybody. Our next -- when is our next public hearing, Paul? March 3 which is Tuesday, right? Our next public hearing is March, Tuesday, and we'll hear the other listing of the bills that we've raised. Thank you all for coming.