



PA 21-51—sSB 914

Veterans' Affairs Committee

**AN ACT CONCERNING MEMBERS OF THE HMONG LAOTIAN
SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS**

SUMMARY: This act extends certain veterans' benefits to members of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units that served in the U.S. secret war in the Kingdom of Laos during the Vietnam War. Specifically, the act extends eligibility for the following benefits to these individuals:

1. veterans' license plates, including for vehicles used exclusively for farming (§ 1);
2. veteran status on a driver's license or identity card (§ 2);
3. \$1,800 toward funeral expenses or cremation for certain indigent veterans (§ 3); and
4. veterans' service ribbon and medal (i.e., the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal) (§ 5).

The act also allows these Hmong veterans to be buried in a veterans' cemetery, which conforms with existing federal law and Department of Veterans Affairs policy (§ 4) (see BACKGROUND).

Under the act, to claim these benefits, the member (or other applicant, as applicable) must submit a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs and provide the department with (1) an affidavit stating when and where the member served and the unit and capacity in which they served; (2) corroborating witness affidavits, if available; (3) any available official service documentation; and (4) any other supporting documents.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2021

VETERANS' LICENSE PLATES

The law allows qualifying veterans, armed forces members, or their surviving spouses to request a special registration certificate and veterans' license plates for any motor vehicle they own or have leased for at least one year, including any motor vehicle they use exclusively for farming if they engage in agricultural production as a trade or profession (CGS § 14-20b). In addition, the act allows Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit members or their surviving spouses to request the special registration and plates by (1) submitting a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs to be listed as a veteran based on their service for purposes of this benefit and (2) providing the required documentation described above.

The department must, within 30 days after receiving the request, verify whether the person was a Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member and, if so, notify the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner about the request

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

and verification.

As under existing law, the DMV commissioner must charge a fee that covers the cost of making the plates, in addition to the motor vehicle registration fee.

VETERAN STATUS ON DRIVER'S LICENSE OR IDENTITY CARD

Existing law requires the DMV commissioner to include a person's status as a veteran on his or her driver's license or identity card. Qualifying veterans must submit a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs, which must verify the veteran's status to the DMV commissioner.

The act allows Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit members to also request this status on their licenses or identity cards by submitting a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs and providing the required documentation. The department must, within 30 days after receiving the request, verify whether the person was a Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member and, if so, notify the DMV commissioner about the request and verification.

As under existing law, the DMV commissioner must indicate the member's veteran status on any license or identification card when originally issued, renewed, or issued as a duplicate.

BACKGROUND

Hmong Veterans' Eligibility for Burial in the State Veterans Cemetery

Eligibility for burial in the State Veterans Cemetery is based on the federal eligibility requirements for burial in national veterans' cemeteries. Under federal law, Hmong veterans are eligible for burial in Department of Veterans Affairs national cemeteries if they (1) died on or after March 23, 2018; (2) resided in the U.S. at the time of their death; and (3) were naturalized citizens under the Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 (38 U.S.C. § 2402(a)(10)). Under this law, existing state Department of Veterans Affairs policy establishes a procedure by which the families of these eligible veterans may apply to the department to determine burial eligibility in the State Veterans' Cemetery in Middletown.

Related Act

PA 21-112 defines the expenses eligible for the state burial benefit for indigent veterans.