



Senate

General Assembly

File No. 730

January Session, 2023

Substitute Senate Bill No. 634

Senate, May 8, 2023

The Committee on Appropriations reported through SEN. OSTEN of the 19th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL VETERANS SERVICES.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2023*):

3 (a) As used in this section, "veteran" has the same meaning as
4 provided in subsection (a) of section 27-103 and "chief executive officer"
5 means the officer described in subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of section
6 7-193.

7 (b) Prior to October 1, 2023:

8 [(a)] (1) Any city or town, either separately or with one or more other
9 cities and towns, may, by ordinance, establish a local veterans' advisory
10 committee which shall have the responsibility of carrying out locally the
11 duties and purposes of this [section] subsection and, within their charter
12 powers and as otherwise provided by law, may make available to such
13 local committees the necessary funds to carry out their duties and

14 responsibilities. The committee may [(1)] (A) act as the coordinating
15 agency in all matters concerning veterans and their dependents,
16 coordinating the activities of public and private facilities concerned with
17 veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to
18 peacetime living; [(2)] (B) cooperate with all national, state and local
19 governmental and private agencies in securing services and benefits to
20 which a veteran or his dependents may be entitled; [(3)] (C) use the
21 services and facilities of the veterans organizations so far as possible to
22 carry out the purposes of this [section; and (4)] subsection; and (D)
23 encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans.

24 [(b) (1)] (2) (A) Any city or town that has not established its own local
25 veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other cities or
26 towns pursuant to [subsection (a) of this section] subdivision (1) of this
27 subsection and does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans'
28 service officer shall designate [(A)] (i) a city or town employee, or [(B)]
29 (ii) a volunteer who is a resident of such city or town, and [(i)] (I) is a
30 veteran, [as defined in subsection (a) of section 27-103, or (ii)] or (II) has
31 practical experience handling veterans' issues, to serve as a municipal
32 [veterans'] veterans representative in such city or town. The
33 Commissioner of Veterans Affairs shall annually send to the chief
34 executive officer of any such city or town an electronic notification of
35 such chief executive officer's duty to so designate a city or town
36 employee or volunteer in accordance with this [subsection] subdivision.
37 Such chief executive officer shall, not later than thirty days after receipt
38 of such notification, submit to the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, as
39 described in subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act,
40 the name and electronic mail address of the city or town employee or
41 volunteer so designated. [As used in this subdivision, "chief executive
42 officer" means the officer described in section 7-193.]

43 [(2)] (B) Each municipal [veterans'] veterans representative shall
44 carry out the duties described in [subsection (a) of this section]
45 subdivision (1) of this subsection and shall complete a training course
46 conducted by the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, as described in
47 subdivision (3) of subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this

48 act, or attend a training session conducted by the manager of said office,
49 as described in subparagraph (A) of subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of
50 said section. Each municipal [veterans'] veterans representative
51 designated on or after October 1, 2019, but prior to October 1, 2023, shall
52 complete such training course not later than one year after the date of
53 such designation. Upon completion of such training course, a municipal
54 [veterans'] veterans representative may thereafter receive electronically
55 any new or updated training information from the Office of Advocacy
56 and Assistance and shall not be required to complete any other such
57 training course.

58 [(3)] (C) Any volunteer designated as a municipal [veterans'] veterans
59 representative by a city or town pursuant to [subdivision (1) of this
60 subsection shall (A)] subparagraph (A) of this subsection shall (i) be
61 available to veterans in person, by telephone or by electronic mail for
62 any minimum number of hours per week that the city or town
63 designating the volunteer may establish, and [(B)] (ii) file a performance
64 report each month with the city or town designating the volunteer that
65 includes, but is not limited to, the names of veterans assisted, services
66 or referrals provided and any other information as determined by the
67 city or town.

68 (c) On and after October 1, 2023:

69 (1) (A) Each municipality shall, for the purposes of carrying out the
70 duties and responsibilities of this subsection:

71 (i) Establish, by ordinance, a municipal veterans advisory committee.
72 Such ordinance shall set forth the number of members of such
73 committee, the method of the members' selection, the members' terms
74 of office and the manner of filling any vacancy. The municipality may
75 make available to such committee the necessary funds to carry out such
76 duties and responsibilities;

77 (ii) Appoint a director of municipal veterans services, who shall be a
78 veteran or have practical experience handling veterans' issues and shall
79 be compensated by such municipality; or

80 (iii) Appoint one or more municipal veterans representatives, each of
81 whom shall be a veteran or have practical experience handling veterans'
82 issues and shall be a current municipal employee or volunteer.

83 (B) (i) Two or more municipalities may jointly carry out the duties
84 and responsibilities under this subsection, provided such municipalities
85 shall enter into a memorandum of agreement or understanding for such
86 purpose, which memorandum may include terms concerning sharing of
87 expenses.

88 (ii) Any municipality that, prior to October 1, 2023, enacted an
89 ordinance establishing a committee, appointed a director or designated
90 a representative pursuant to subsection (b) of this section shall have
91 satisfied the requirement under this subdivision.

92 (2) (A) Each municipal veterans advisory committee, director of
93 municipal veterans services or municipal veterans representative, as
94 applicable, shall (i) assist veterans and veterans' dependents in
95 accessing services and benefits to which such veterans or dependents
96 may be entitled; (ii) assist in coordinating the activities of public and
97 private facilities concerned with veterans' reemployment, education,
98 rehabilitation and adjustment to peacetime living; (iii) cooperate with
99 all national, state and local governmental and private providers in
100 connecting veterans and veterans' dependents with services and
101 benefits to which such veterans or dependents may be entitled; (iv)
102 encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans; and
103 (v) coordinate with veterans organizations, as practicable, to carry out
104 the purposes of this subsection.

105 (B) A member of such committee designated by such committee, or
106 such director or representative, as applicable, shall (i) be available to
107 veterans in person, by telephone or by electronic mail for a minimum
108 number of days or hours per week, as determined by the municipality;
109 (ii) file with the municipality each month a report that includes, but is
110 not limited to, the names of veterans and veterans' dependents who
111 were provided assistance, the services or referrals that were provided
112 and any other information required by the municipality; and (iii) not

113 later than one year after such member's, director's or representative's
114 designation or appointment, as applicable, complete a veterans benefits
115 and programs training course conducted pursuant to subdivision (3) of
116 subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, by the Office of
117 Advocacy and Assistance within the Department of Veterans Affairs,
118 except that any such member, director or representative who completed
119 such training course pursuant to subsection (b) of this section prior to
120 October 1, 2023, shall have satisfied the requirement under this clause.
121 After completion of such training course, such member, director or
122 representative may thereafter receive electronically any new or updated
123 training information from said office and shall not be required to
124 complete any other such training course.

125 (3) The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs shall annually notify each
126 municipality's chief executive officer of the requirement under
127 subdivision (1) of this subsection. Not later than thirty days after receipt
128 of such notification, the chief executive officer shall provide to the Office
129 of Advocacy and Assistance the name and electronic mail address of
130 each member of the municipal veterans advisory committee, the
131 director of municipal veterans services or each municipal veterans
132 representative, as applicable.

133 Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 27-102l of the general statutes is
134 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
135 *1, 2023*):

136 (b) (1) The commissioner may appoint a manager to administer an
137 Office of Advocacy and Assistance for the aid and benefit of veterans
138 and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members. The office
139 shall have a staff of not less than [~~eight~~] ten men and women, including
140 [~~six~~] eight veterans' service officers, and clerical personnel. The manager
141 and veterans' service officers shall be veterans, as defined in subsection
142 (a) of section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded the armed forces
143 expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces.

144 (2) (A) The manager shall develop a training module on assisting and
145 serving women veterans with regard to state or federal services or

146 benefits and identifying and advising such veterans of community or
147 nonprofit programs focused on assisting and serving such veterans. The
148 manager shall hold and provide instruction for an annual training
149 session, in accordance with such module, to each veterans' service
150 officer and any [municipal veterans'] member of a municipal veterans
151 advisory committee, director of municipal veterans services or
152 municipal veterans representative, as described in subsection [(b)] (c) of
153 section 27-135, as amended by this act, or representative from an
154 Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service Members center at a
155 public institution of higher education in this state.

156 (B) At least one of the veterans' service officers shall be a woman
157 having a demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who
158 shall be responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon
159 the next opening of a veterans' service officer position occurring on or
160 after July 1, 2010, at least two of the veterans' service officers shall be
161 individuals having bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish, within
162 existing authorized positions. At least two of the veterans' service
163 officers shall, in addition to carrying out the duties under this section,
164 be responsible for overseeing and supporting municipalities'
165 compliance with the provisions of section 27-135, as amended by this
166 act. Each veterans' service officer shall (i) successfully complete a course
167 in veterans' benefits not later than one year after commencement of
168 employment, (ii) attend the training session described in subparagraph
169 (A) of this subdivision, and (iii) be assigned to one of the five
170 congressional districts of the state.

171 (3) The office staff shall, at least twice annually, conduct a training
172 course for any [municipal veterans'] member of a municipal veterans
173 advisory committee, director of municipal veterans services or
174 municipal veterans representative. The office staff shall include in such
175 training course a summary of state and federal services and benefits, the
176 [duties to be carried out by each municipal veterans' representative, as
177 described in subsection (a) of] requirements under section 27-135, as
178 amended by this act, and any assistance the office staff may provide to
179 any [municipal veterans'] such member, director or representative

180 related to such [duties] requirements.

181 (4) (A) The office shall develop a written outreach plan identifying (i)
182 strategies for conducting outreach to veterans and their spouses, eligible
183 dependents and family members for purposes of providing assistance
184 in claims for veterans' services or benefits, and (ii) to the extent possible,
185 specific events and other opportunities to provide such assistance that
186 are sponsored by the office or in which the office is participating. The
187 office shall update such written outreach plan as necessary to improve
188 the efficacy of its outreach efforts.

189 (B) The manager and each veterans' service officer shall electronically
190 track information relating to outreach conducted or attended by the
191 office, including, but not limited to, the title or type of any outreach
192 event conducted or attended and the number of veterans or their
193 spouses, eligible dependents or family members to whom substantive
194 services or referrals were provided.

195 (C) The office shall utilize the notifications received from the
196 administrator of each nursing home and assisted living facility in the
197 state, pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, to
198 develop an annual schedule for each veterans' service officer to visit
199 nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The office shall compile any
200 information collected as a result of such visits and provide quarterly
201 reports on such information to the Board of Trustees for the Department
202 of Veterans Affairs.

203 (D) The office shall provide quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees
204 for the Department of Veterans Affairs on (i) concerns raised by veterans
205 or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members, which
206 concerns shall be summarized by type, frequency and resolution, (ii)
207 petitions filed by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or
208 family members received by the commissioner under section 27-102l(d)-
209 54 of the regulations of Connecticut state agencies for the four preceding
210 months, and (iii) copies of any such petitions.

211 Sec. 3. Subsection (c) of section 27-102q of the general statutes is

212 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
213 *1, 2023*):

214 (c) To the extent practicable, the Department of Veterans Affairs shall
215 (1) provide information on its Internet web site regarding legal services
216 organizations that assist veterans in military discharge upgrades,
217 including, but not limited to, links to such organizations' Internet web
218 sites, and (2) provide printed resources concerning methods for
219 obtaining military discharge upgrades, which are created by such legal
220 services organizations, to veterans at the department's offices and
221 facilities and disseminate such resources to [local veterans'] municipal
222 veterans advisory committees, directors of municipal veterans services
223 and municipal veterans representatives, as described in section 27-135,
224 as amended by this act.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>October 1, 2023</i>	27-135
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2023</i>	27-102l(b)
Sec. 3	<i>October 1, 2023</i>	27-102q(c)

VA *Joint Favorable Subst.-LCO C/R* APP
APP *Joint Favorable*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 24 \$	FY 25 \$
Vet. Affairs, Dept.	GF - Cost	137,000	140,000
State Comptroller – Fringe Benefits ¹	GF - Cost	60,000	60,000

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 24 \$	FY 25 \$
Various Municipalities	STATE MANDATE ² - Potential Cost	Up to 100,000	Up to 100,000

Explanation

The bill: (1) requires municipalities to establish a municipal veterans advisory committee by ordinance, (2) allows municipalities to make funds available for the committee to carry out duties and responsibilities, and (3) requires each municipality to appoint a director of municipal veterans’ services.

The bill allows municipalities to jointly carry out the duties of this bill regarding the veterans advisory committee and the director of municipal veterans’ services under a memorandum of agreement. This

¹ The fringe benefit costs for most state employees are budgeted centrally in accounts administered by the Comptroller. The estimated active employee fringe benefit cost associated with most personnel changes is **42.82%** of payroll in **FY 23**.

² State mandate is defined in Sec. 2-32b(2) of the Connecticut General Statutes, "state mandate" means any state initiated constitutional, statutory or executive action that requires a local government to establish, expand or modify its activities in such a way as to necessitate additional expenditures from local revenues.

results in a potential cost to municipalities beginning in FY 24. The extent of these costs is dependent on the structure of each municipal veterans advisory committee and any funds provided by a municipality. Municipalities that do not already have a director of municipal veterans' services will be required to appoint one. This could result in a cost of up to \$100,000 annually.

The bill also requires the Office of Advocacy and Assistance within the Department of Veterans' Affairs to increase the number of Veteran Service Officers from six to eight, which results in a cost of approximately \$137,000 in FY 24 and \$140,000 FY 25 with corresponding fringe benefit costs of approximately \$60,000 in both FY 24 and FY 25.

The Out Years

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future subject to inflation.

OLR Bill Analysis**sSB 634*****AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL VETERANS SERVICES.*****SUMMARY**

This bill reorganizes the laws requiring municipalities to establish veterans representative programs and makes various changes to them, including allowing municipalities to jointly carry out their program-related duties.

The bill also requires at least two veteran service officers (VSO) in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Office of Advocacy and Assistance to be responsible for overseeing and supporting municipalities' compliance with municipal veterans representative program requirements, in addition to their other duties (see BACKGROUND). It also increases the office's minimum number of VSOs (from six to eight) and total staff members (from 8 to 10).

The bill also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2023

MUNICIPAL VETERANS REPRESENTATIVE PROGRAM***Designated Entities***

Under current law, each municipality must have a municipal veterans representative program and designate an entity to carry out the program's duties. It requires that each municipality do at least one of the following:

1. establish by ordinance a municipal veterans advisory committee, which the municipality may fund,
2. provide funding for a municipal veterans service officer, or

3. designate as a municipal veterans representative a municipal (a) employee or (b) volunteer who is a veteran or has practical experience handling veterans' issues.

Current law authorizes municipalities to jointly form a shared veterans advisory committee but requires those that do to each have a municipal veterans services officer or representative, as well.

Beginning October 1, 2023, the bill similarly requires municipalities to designate one of these entities to carry out the program's duties except it allows municipalities to (1) appoint a paid director of municipal veterans services (instead of funding a municipal veterans services officer) and (2) jointly satisfy the bill's requirements if they enter into a memorandum of understanding or agreement to do so, which may include terms on sharing expenses. It is unclear if a municipality may jointly share a committee, director, or representative through a memorandum or if each municipality must maintain its own.

The bill requires that a representative be a veteran or have practical experience in veterans affairs issues. (Current law only requires this if the representative is a volunteer.) It also requires any municipal ordinance establishing a veterans advisory committee to include the number of committee members and their terms, how members are selected, and procedures for filling a vacancy.

Under the bill, a municipality that is in compliance with the current law before October 1, 2023, is considered in compliance with these requirements.

Duties and Responsibilities

Current law specifies different responsibilities for advisory committees and representatives (e.g., only volunteer representatives must be available for a minimum number of hours per week, set by the municipality).

The bill generally applies the responsibilities in the current law to all advisory committees, directors, and representatives. Under the bill, they

must do the following:

1. help veterans and their dependents get services and benefits, including by cooperating with national, state, local, and private providers;
2. coordinate public and private facilities' activities concerned with veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation, and adjustment to peacetime living;
3. encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans;
4. coordinate with veterans organizations, as practicable;
5. be available to veterans in person, by phone, or by email for a minimum number of hours per week set by the municipality; and
6. file a monthly report with the municipality that includes the names of those helped, services or referrals provided, and any other information the municipality requires.

Training Requirements

Under existing law, municipal representatives must receive training from the Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OAA) within one year of their designation. It does not require any additional training, but OAA must electronically give them any new or updated training information.

The bill expands this requirement to all committee members and directors in addition to representatives. The bill specifies that these people must complete the OAA training on state and federal services and benefits. (Current law authorizes either this training or a training on helping and serving women veterans.) Those already in compliance under current law are not required to retake this training.

In a conforming change, the bill requires OAA to give printed resources on military discharge upgrades to committees, directors, and representatives.

Annual Notification

Under current law, the veterans affairs commissioner must electronically notify the municipality’s chief executive officer (CEO) each year of the requirement to designate a representative. The CEO, within 30 days of notification, must give OAA the name and email address of the municipal representative. The bill requires the CEO to give the names and email addresses of all committee members, the director, and all municipal representatives, as applicable, to OAA. It also removes the requirement that the commissioner’s notification be electronic.

BACKGROUND

Office of Advocacy and Assistance VSOs

Within the DVA, the OAA is generally responsible for helping veterans and their families get veterans benefits under federal, state, and local laws (CGS § 27-102l). Each VSO must be assigned to one of Connecticut’s five congressional districts.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

Joint Favorable Change of Reference - APP
Yea 20 Nay 0 (03/07/2023)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 52 Nay 0 (04/20/2023)