



General Assembly

January Session, 2023

Substitute Bill No. 634



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 Section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the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*

