

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-376

AN ACT ELIMINATING SERVICE IN TIME OF WAR AS AN ELIGIBILITY

Title: CRITERION FOR CERTAIN STATE AND MUNICIPAL VETERANS' BENEFITS.

Vote Date: 2/18/2025

Vote Action: JOINT FAVORABLE

PH Date: 1/30/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

Sen. Jeff Gordon, 35th Dist.

Rep. Christopher Poulos, 81st Dist.

Rep. Kurt Vail, 52nd Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

Many state veterans' benefits require the applicant to have served in time of war. This bill eliminates that eligibility criterion from some of the most critical benefits. In doing so, it expands veteran eligibility for the following:

- A property tax exemption of at least \$1500
- Tuition waivers at public institutions
- Automatic points on state civil service exams
- Temporary financial assistance from the veterans' affairs commissioner
- Free motor vehicle registration and specialty license plates for certain disabled veterans
- Funeral honor guards
- Exemption from municipal fees for hawker or peddler permits

Eliminating service in time of war as a criterion for collecting these benefits would provide opportunities for higher education and workforce development to more veterans, offer them financial relief through several different avenues, and expand access to military funeral services.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Zak Leavy, Legislative and Political Coordinator, AFSCME: Mr. Leavy explained that, regardless of whether or not a veteran served during a time of war, they risked their lives for this country. As such, all veterans should have equal access to the benefits outlined in this bill.

Allison Weir, Executive Director, CT Veterans Legal Center: Ms. Weir noted that service members who do not serve during a time of war often undergo the same rigorous training as those who do, with the key example being those veterans that served during the Cold War. Given the dedication of all veterans, and the inherent danger in military training, she argues that should receive the benefits in this bill. Additionally, Ms. Weir points out that the federal government already administers educational benefits similar to those laid out in the bill without the eligibility criterion of service in time of war.

K. Robert Lewis, Legislative Committee Chair, American Legion Department of CT: As a veterans' service officer with the American Legion, Mr. Lewis noted their support of the bill.

Raymond Higgins: Mr. Higgins explained that during the Cold War, service members were regularly endangered and put into harm's way; because very little of that period was designated as a time of war though, those veterans – Mr. Higgins included – are now ineligible for many state benefits. He stated that no matter where or when a veteran served, a veteran is a veteran.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Sam Sims

Date: 2/20/2025