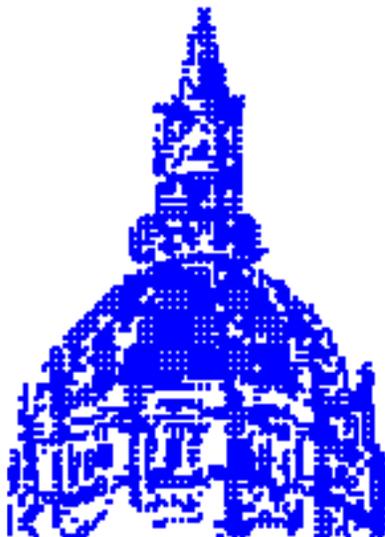


Office of Legislative Research
Connecticut General Assembly



VETERANS AND THE ARMED FORCES



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NOTICE TO READERS

This report provides brief highlights of new laws (public acts) affecting veterans and armed forces members passed during the 2007 regular and special sessions. At the end of each summary, we indicate the public act (PA) number. The acts are effective October 1, 2007, unless otherwise indicated.

Not all provisions of the acts are included here. Complete summaries of all 2007 public acts will be available in the fall when OLR's *Public Act Summary* book is published; some are already on OLR's webpage:

<http://www.cga.ct.gov/olr/OLRPASums.asp>

Readers are encouraged to obtain the full text of acts that interest them from the Connecticut State Library, the House Clerk's Office, or the General Assembly's website: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/>

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BURIAL IN STATE VETERANS' CEMETERY

A new law expands the number of people eligible for burial in Connecticut veterans' cemeteries. Prior law limited burials to veterans honorably discharged or released from active service in, or any women's auxiliary branch of, the U.S. Armed Forces (Navy, Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard). In practice, these included veterans killed in action or who died as a result of an accident sustained while performing active service. The new law explicitly adds these veterans.

The law also extends eligibility to any Connecticut National Guard member who (1) completed at least 20 years of guard service or (2) was killed in action or died as a result of an accident or illness sustained while performing active service in the guard. One spouse of any qualified member is also eligible for burial in any of the cemeteries.

PA 07-13, effective July 1, 2007

VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

A new law requires that at least one of the six veterans service officers (VSO) in the Veterans' Advocacy and

Assistance Unit be proficient in both English and Spanish. The requirement takes effect on the next opening of a VSO position after June 30, 2007.

The unit is responsible for helping veterans and their eligible spouses and dependents obtain veterans' benefits.

PA 07-97, effective July 1, 2007

DISRUPTION OF FUNERALS

A new law prohibits certain activities at certain locations from 60 minutes before to 60 minutes after a funeral, which is defined as a ceremony or memorial service connected to burying or cremating an individual. It subjects to punishment anyone who:

1. willfully makes or assists in making a noise or diversion that is not part of the funeral, (b) intentionally disturbs the funeral's peace or good order, and (c) is within the "boundary of the location" of the funeral or within 150 feet of the boundary's intersection with a road, pathway, or other entrance or exit from the location; or
2. is within 300 feet of the boundary and (b) intentionally, willfully, and without authorization impedes the entrance or exit from the location.

A violation is a class A misdemeanor.

PA 07-98, effective October 1, 2007 (but PA 07-187 changes the effective date to upon passage).

STATE OFFICERS AND EMPLOYERS

A new law extends (1) paid leave to state employees called by the president or governor to active service in "Operation Jump Start" at the border of the United States and Mexico and (2) health insurance coverage to such employees and their dependents. These employees get (1) full state pay for active-duty leave up to 30 days and (2) payment of the difference between their state pay (including longevity) and military pay after 30 days. They and their dependents continue to receive state health insurance coverage for the duration of the call-up as long as the employees continue to make their co-payments at pre-activation levels.

Existing law already provides these same benefits to state employees called to active service in

1. Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan war),
2. Operation Noble Eagle (anti-terrorism activities within the United States),
3. any related military or emergency operation whose mission was substantially changed because of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks,

4. any federal or state action authorized by the governor to support Operation Liberty Shield or combat terrorism in the United States, and
5. military action authorized by the president against Iraq.

The new law prohibits employers from denying benefits to state employees called to active service in the above conflicts solely because a collective bargaining agreement classifies their leave as recess or other equivalent leave rather than vacation. These include bargaining agreements covering state employees in teaching, instructional, or professional positions in Unified School Districts 1, 2, or 3.

PA 07-112, effective upon passage

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ARMED FORCES MEMBERS

A new law (1) increases civil penalties and establishes criminal penalties for discriminating against armed forces members based on their membership or uniform, (2) increases the criminal fine for wearing a military uniform without authorization, and (3) makes it a crime to falsely represent oneself as a recipient of a Congressional or armed forces service medal or badge.

PA 07-128, effective October 1, 2007

GRACE PERIOD FOR RENEWING CREDENTIALS

A new law extends, from six months to one year after discharge, the grace period during which the Department of Public Health (DPH) must renew certain DPH credentials that become void while the holders are on active duty in the armed forces. It establishes the same grace period for National Guard members whose credentials lapsed while they were performing military service ordered by the governor.

The new law establishes a grace period during which non-DPH executive branch agencies, departments, boards (except the State Board of Education (SBE)), commissions, or officials must renew the professional credentials of all such members in the same circumstances above. The renewal is valid for one year after discharge from such duty or service or until the member successfully renews the license, whichever comes first.

The new law also requires the SBE to renew expired SBE certificates, authorizations, and permits if the member applies within one year after discharge from active duty or ordered military service. The renewal must be valid for at least the amount of time the member was on active duty or ordered military service, but it cannot be valid for

longer than the period for which original credential was valid.

PA 07-157, effective July 1, 2007

LICENSE PLATES AND DRIVERS' LICENSES

New legislation requires the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) to issue a special license plate, if requested by a spouse, mother, father, brother, sister, child grandmother, or grandfather of any Connecticut service member killed in the line of duty. The plate must bear the words "Gold Star Family" and the design must be approved by a committee the commissioner establishes for this purpose. The special plates may be requested for any vehicle a qualifying family member owns or leases for a period of more than one year. The commissioner may charge a fee for the plates that covers the cost of their manufacture, which must be in addition to the normal registration fee for the vehicle.

PA 07-167 (§ 24), effective upon passage

DRIVERS' LICENSES

A new law authorizes the DMV commissioner to renew licenses and identity cards without a personal appearance by the holder in certain circumstances. These include when the holder is a member of the armed forces. The commissioner must require

an applicant's personal appearance if

1. he is not satisfied with the reasons why the person cannot appear in person,
2. he does not have the person's photograph or digital image on file,
3. he has reason to believe the person is no longer a state resident, or
4. the applicant has not presented satisfactory evidence of identity.

PA 07-167 (§ 19), effective October 1, 2007

SERVICE BONUS FOR ARMED FORCES MEMBERS

New legislation increases, from \$500 to \$1,200, service bonus payments to current or former Connecticut National Guard members who serve or served in combat zones on or after September 11, 2001, and it establishes a maximum \$500 bonus for current or former guard members whose active service during the same period is or was not in a combat zone.

PA 07-187, effective July 1, 2007

This new law transfers the administration of the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund to the American Legion from the state treasurer and makes related changes.

PA 07-187, effective upon passage

COMMEMORATIVE ROAD NAMES

A new law designates commemorative names for various state highway segments.

PA 07-232, effective upon passage

INCOME TAX CREDIT STUDY

A new law requires the Office of Legislative Research to study the effect a state earned income tax credit on members of the U.S. Armed forces and submit the results to three legislative committees by February 1, 2008.

PA 07-1 (§ 133), June Special Session, effective July 1, 2007

VETERANS' BURIAL EXPENSES

A new law increases the amount that the state may pay for the funeral expenses of indigent veterans from \$150 to \$1,800.

PA 07-2 (§ 45), June Special Session, effective July 1, 2007

VETERANS' HEALTH REGISTRY

New legislation allows the Veterans Affairs' Department to establish and maintain a registry of health data on armed forces members who have completed a period of active service. The department may use the data to (1) study the potential short- and long-term effects of environmental hazards on such members and (2) inform, customize and coordinate the

provision of health care service to them. It must accomplish these tasks using available resources.

The new law applies to members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, air Force, and reserves, including guard members performing under federal law. It allows the department to develop surveys for members or their health care providers to provide registry data voluntarily during or after their period of active service. The surveys and data must be related members' illnesses and potential correlations between such illnesses and environmental hazards.

The department must collect and maintain the surveys and data in accordance with the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). Except for individually identifiable health data, which may be released only with the member's consent in accordance with HIPPA, the registry database information is disclosable under the Freedom of Information Act.

PA 07-2 (§ 46), June Special Session, effective July 1, 2008

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