



Acts Affecting Veterans and the Military

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Notice to Readers

This report provides summaries of new laws (public acts and special acts) significantly affecting veterans and the military enacted during the 2021 regular session and June 2021 special session (JSS). OLR's other Acts Affecting reports are, or will soon be, available on OLR's website:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/olr/actsaffecting.asp>.

Each summary indicates the public act (PA) or special act (SA) number. Not all provisions of the acts are included. The report does not include vetoed acts unless the veto was overridden.

Complete summaries of public acts are, or will soon be, available on OLR's website:

<https://www.cga.ct.gov/olr/olrsums.asp>.

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

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Benefits Eligibility

Expanded Definition of Veteran and Establishment of a Qualifying Review Board

This session, the legislature extended state veterans benefits to individuals released from service with an other than honorable (OTH) discharge whose sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is determined to be more likely than not the primary reason for the OTH discharge. The law establishes a Qualifying Review Board to determine whether the veteran's discharge meets the law's criteria. Veterans whose applications are approved through the review board process are eligible to apply for state-based veterans benefits, including bonus points on state civil service exams, property tax exemptions, and tuition waivers at the state's public colleges and universities ([PA 21-79](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Veteran Funeral Expenses

A new law defines the funeral expenses eligible for the state burial benefit for indigent veterans. By law, when a veteran dies and does not leave enough money to pay for burial expenses, as determined by the veterans commissioner after consulting with the appropriate probate court, the state must pay \$1,800 toward his or her funeral expenses for burial or cremation. Under the new law, "funeral expenses" mean the cost of (1) cash advances paid by the funeral director; (2) funeral services and funeral merchandise (e.g., alternate containers, caskets, urns, vaults, and outer burial containers); (3) burial, cremation, or disposition; and (4) publishing an obituary ([PA 21-112](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Veterans' Benefits for Hmong Laotian Veterans

Under a new law, members of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units that served during the Vietnam War in the U.S. secret war in the Kingdom of Laos are now eligible for certain veterans' benefits. This includes (1) veterans' license plates, (2) veteran status on a driver's license or identity card, (3) \$1,800 toward funeral expenses or cremation for certain indigent veterans, and (4) the Connecticut Veterans Wartime Service Medal. The act also allows these Hmong veterans to be buried in a state veterans' cemetery, which conforms with existing federal law and state Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) policy.

Under the act, to claim these benefits the member (or other applicant, as applicable) must submit a request to the DVA 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 ([PA 21-51](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Education

College Campus Mental Health Coalitions

Under a new law, each higher education institution in Connecticut, excluding Charter Oak State College or online institutions, must establish a mental health coalition by January 1, 2022, to assess the presence of mental health services and programs offered by the institution. It requires each institution to ensure that coalition members are educated on the protocols and techniques to respond to student mental illness that have been developed with consideration given to the students' status as a veteran or U.S. armed forces member, among other things ([PA 21-132](#), § 3, effective July 1, 2021).

College Credit for Military Training

A new law requires, by July 1, 2022, and every five years thereafter, each higher education institution's governing body to review and update its policies on awarding college credit for a student's military training, coursework, and education ([PA 21-132](#), § 1, effective July 1, 2021).

Public School Enrollment and Services for Military-Connected Students

Under a new law, boards of education must accept certain military orders indicating a member's transfer to the state as proof-of-residency for public school enrollment purposes, enabling military members' children to meet registration and application deadlines in advance of their physical relocation to the state. The law additionally requires the State Board of Education, within available appropriations, to establish a Purple Star School Program to designate schools that provide specific support services and assistance for military-connected students and their families (e.g., a designated military liaison, a student-led transition program, and staff training) ([PA 21-86](#), effective July 1, 2021).

Employment

Military Spouse Professional Licensure

A new law makes it easier for health care professionals and various tradespeople and other professionals licensed in other states (including military spouses) to obtain a Connecticut credential if they reside here. It does so by generally requiring the Department of Public Health (DPH) or Department of Consumer Protection (DCP) to issue the appropriate license or other credential to a state resident, or a spouse of an active duty service member permanently stationed here, if that person meets specified experience and background requirements (e.g., has no disciplinary history).

It allows DPH or DCP, as applicable, to deny a credential if the commissioner finds it to be in the state's best interest ([PA 21-152](#), §§ 1 & 4, effective October 1, 2021).

Military to Machinists Program Funding

This year's budget implementer act removed Workforce Training Authority Fund expenditures as a funding source for the Military to Machinists Program. This pilot program assists veterans with the cost of attendance for qualified advanced manufacturing certificate programs ([PA 21-2](#), June Special Session (JSS), § 248, effective July 1, 2021).

Priority Applicants for Economic Development Financial Assistance

A new law requires the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) commissioner to prioritize applicants for economic development financial assistance (i.e., DECD-approved grants, loans, loan guarantees, or combination) that demonstrate a willingness to make jobs available to certain individuals, including veterans ([PA 21-188](#), § 2, effective October 1, 2021).

Motor Vehicles

Commercial Driver's License Knowledge Tests for Eligible Veterans and Service Members

New legislation authorizes the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner to waive commercial driver's license (CDL) knowledge tests at her discretion for eligible veterans and active duty service members who meet conditions set by federal regulation. By law, the commissioner must waive the CDL driving skills test for such applicants who meet similar conditions ([PA 21-106](#), § 9, effective July 1, 2021).

Fee Waiver for Veterans

A new law authorizes the DMV commissioner to waive driver's license and identity card renewal or duplication fees for certain veterans while attending a DVA-hosted one-day event that offers services, supplies, or assistance to veterans ([PA 21-106](#), § 50, effective upon passage).

License Plates for Veterans and Armed Forces Members With Wartime Service

A new law requires DMV to issue special license plates indicating service during certain statutorily-defined periods of war at the request of any veteran or armed forces member who received a campaign medal. The plates must bear the words "(Name of War) Veteran." The DMV commissioner

must charge an additional fee for the plate that covers its entire production cost. The plates expire and must be renewed in the same manner as other existing license plates.

Under the act, a veteran's or armed forces member's surviving spouse may retain the plates for his or her lifetime or until he or she remarries. If an armed forces member is dishonorably discharged, he or she must return the plates to DMV within 30 days after his or her discharge date ([PA 21-106](#), § 49, effective January 1, 2022).

Replacement Veterans' Plates

Under existing law, the DMV commissioner generally must charge a fee of \$20 to replace vehicle plates. A new law establishes a specific fee of \$15 for replacing veterans' plates that become mutilated or illegible ([PA 21-106](#), § 40, effective July 1, 2021).

State Militia

Governor's Authority to Raise a Connecticut State Guard

A new law authorizes the governor, at any time, to raise, organize, maintain, and govern the Connecticut State Guard. The prior law required the governor to take such action only when the Connecticut National Guard was called into the federal service or believed that such a call was imminent ([PA 21-2](#), JSS, § 282, effective October 1, 2021).

Organizational Structure of the State's Militia Units

A new law eliminates the requirement that each organization of the state's armed forces adopt bylaws. It instead requires the governor, as commander-in-chief of the state's militia, to configure and administer the state's militia units similar to National Guard or federal military units of similar composition, size, and purpose. It also allows the adjutant general to issue bylaws, regulations, orders, and circulars to administer the militia units.

The act also eliminates provisions related to the bylaws, including those on the (1) collection of fines and dues, (2) leadership of associations created in the bylaws, and (3) election and bond requirements of the organization's treasurer ([PA 21-158](#), effective October 1, 2021).

Miscellaneous

Creation of a Veterans and Military Tourism Trail

A new law allows the DVA to establish a (1) veterans and military tourism trail that links museums, memorials, battleground sites, and other historic sites related to veterans and the U.S. Armed

Forces and (2) program to publicize the trail and publish an informational brochure on the trail sites' locations and histories, provided the DVA commissioner solicits private donations to cover their costs ([PA 21-105](#), effective July 1, 2021).

Group Fishing License

A new law increases the number of participants allowed under a group fishing license from 50 to 100 people. By law, the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection may issue a group fishing license to a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization to conduct up to 50 group fishing events per year for qualified individuals, including disabled veterans ([PA 21-12](#), § 3, effective upon passage).

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