

|                      |   |           |
|----------------------|---|-----------|
| <b>Act Number:</b>   | 09-163  |           |
| <b>Bill Number:</b>  | 6394  |           |
| <b>Senate Pages:</b> | 5693, 5701-5703   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>House Pages:</b>  | 9609-9612   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Committee:</b>    | Veterans: 172-177, 192-197,<br>210-211, 219-220, 223, 227 | <b>18</b> |
|                      | <b>Page Total:</b>  | <b>26</b> |

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**CONNECTICUT  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS  
2009**

**VOL. 52  
PART 18  
5683 – 5943**

mhr  
SENATE

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June 2, 2009

There's a motion to place House Bill Number 6486, off the Senate Agenda Number 1, on the Consent Calendar. Without objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes; thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, also for a marking, on Senate Agenda Number 3, would ask for a suspension to mark an item on Senate Agenda Number 3. House Bill 6394, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF FUND, would move for suspension to mark that item go.

THE CHAIR:

There's a motion on the floor to suspend rules to mark House Bill Number 6394 as a go, off of Senate Agenda Number 3. Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes; thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, now I would move to place House Bill 6394 on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

There's a motion on the floor to place House Bill Number 6394, off of Senate Agenda Number 3, on the Consent Calendar. Without objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

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Mr. Clerk, please call Consent Calendar.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber. Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber.

Mr. President, those items placed on the Second Consent Calendar --

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, please hold for a second.

I'm trying to hear the Clerk call the Consent Calendar and I'm sure you don't want to miss that vote either, so if I could have your attention and quiet, please.

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

The items placed on the Second Consent Calendar begin on Senate Agenda 1, substitute for House Bill 6486, substitute for House Bill 6649. Senate Agenda Number 3, House Bill 6394. Today's Calendar, Calendar Page 3, Calendar 317, Senate Bill 586; Calendar Page 4, Calendar 455, House Bill 5018; Calendar Page 7, Calendar Number 593, Substitute House Bill 5286; Calendar Page 8, Calendar 606, substitute

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for House Bill 5883; Calendar Page 9, Calendar 619,  
House Bill 6343; Calendar 626, House Bill 6476;  
Calendar 629, substitute for House Bill 6232; Calendar  
Page 10, Calendar 634, House Bill 6544; Calendar 636,  
substitute for House Bill 6483; Calendar Page 11,  
Calendar 649, substitute for House Bill 6466; Calendar  
Page 13, Calendar 663, substitute for House Bill 5254;  
Calendar Page 15, Calendar 680, substitute for House  
Bill 5821; Calendar Page 16, Calendar 684, House  
Bill 6231; Calendar Page 17, Calendar 689, substitute  
for House Bill 5421; Calendar Page 18, Calendar 695,  
substitute for House Bill 6419; Calendar Page 19,  
Calendar 699, substitute for House Bill 6284; Calendar  
Page 21, Calendar 711, House Bill 5099; Calendar 712,  
substitute for House Bill 6025; Calendar Page 22,  
Calendar 718, substitute for House Bill 5861; Calendar  
Page 23, Calendar 720, substitute for House Bill 5108;  
Calendar Page 32, Calendar 450, House Bill 6233;  
Calendar 467, substitute for Senate Bill 1031; and,  
Calendar Page 35, Calendar 205, substitute for Senate  
Bill 948. Mr. President, that completes the items  
placed on the Second Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Will you please call the Consent Calendar? The  
machine will be open.

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THE CLERK:

The Senate is now voting by roll call on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber. The Senate is now voting by roll call on the Consent Calendar. Will all Senators please return to the chamber.

THE CHAIR:

Have all Senators voted? If all Senators have voted, please check your vote. The machine will be closed. The Clerk will call the tally.

THE CLERK:

Motion is on adoption of Consent Calendar  
Number 2:

|                             |    |
|-----------------------------|----|
| Total Number Voting         | 36 |
| Those voting Yea            | 36 |
| Those voting Nay            | 0  |
| Those absent and not voting | 0  |

THE CHAIR:

Consent Calendar Number 2 passes.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, would move for immediate transmittal to the House of Representatives of any items voted on, on Consent Calendar Number 2, requiring additional action by the

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HOUSE**

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DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The bill passes. Will the Clerk please call Calendar number 136.

THE CLERK:

On page 3, Calendar 136, House Bill number 6394, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF FUND a favorable report by the Committee on Planning and Development.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Graziani, you have the floor, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I move for the acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question is on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill. Will you remark? Representative Graziani.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Ladies and gentlemen, members of the chamber the Military Relief Fund is now going to be once upon passage expanded. And I'd like to thank the efforts of our Governor, the Military Department, Commissioner Schwartz again, and of course the members of the

Veterans Affairs Committee to sheparding this thing -- this bill through. Madam Speaker, what this bill does is now include members that are no longer on active duty. That's a key thing. No longer on active duty because we need to help those who gave so much. For example, when one is deployed loss of income right off the bat.

The warrior not only has to think about that while he or she is serving his country but what about the family's need. So now when they come back and they're discharged the monetary aspect doesn't go away; the shortfall, the medical needs, the posttraumatic stress disorder. You name it. Those are an awful lot of stresses to deal with. What this fund will do now is make it eligible for their spouses and immediate family members to access that. And what that means it could pay for daycare. It could pay for automobile repairs. You name it. It's something that can be done.

And I might add, it only takes from the time someone puts in application for assistance, it's normally turned around within a week which is remarkable because we certainly do not want to leave anybody hanging out there. And I might add this military fund brings in a line with the Department of Defense Yellow Ribbon Reintegration program authorized by the Department of Defense. Because we realize people do have time -- hard time

adjusting. So what's -- what this body can do -- what this body can do is pass this bill and let's help those who's given us so much and continue to give. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you so much, Representative Graziani. Will you care to remark further on the bill before us?

Representative Harkins of the 120.

REP. HARKINS (120th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I too rise in support of the bill. It's a good bill as stated Representative Graziani. I won't repeat all the comments that he went through describing the bill but it does help those families in need. And most importantly it also helps those suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder. Something you don't hear all the time but at a time of war it's actually a very important issue to those families that are affected by those veterans coming home. So Madam Speaker, I rise in support of this. I urge my colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you and thank you for your comments, Representative. Will you care to remark further on the bill before us? Will you care to remark further on the bill before us? If not, staff and

guests please come to the well of the House. Members take your seats. The machine will be opened.

THE CLERK:

The House of Representatives is voting by roll call.

Members to the chamber. The House is taking a roll call vote.

Members to the chamber please.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members voted?  
Please check the board to determine if your vote has been  
properly cast. If so the machine will be locked and the Clerk  
will take a tally. And will the Clerk please announce the  
tally.

THE CLERK:

House Bill 6394

Total number voting 143

Necessary for passage 72

Those voting Yea 143

Those voting Nay 0

Those absent and not voting 8

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, Mr. Clerk. The bill passes.

Are there any announcements or points of personal  
privilege? Announcements or points of personal privilege?

**JOINT  
STANDING  
COMMITTEE  
HEARINGS**

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RUSSELL BONACCORSO: (Inaudible.)

REP. GRAZIANI: Okay. Thank you for correcting me.

Go ahead Russell.

RUSSELL BONACCORSO: Hear me okay? Okay, thank you gentlemen.

I'm here to support House Bill Number 6394, and I'm representing the Connecticut Military Department on behalf of the Adjutant General Major General Thaddeus Martin.

The military family relief fund was established in 2005 by Public Act 05-3 in the June Special Session of the Connecticut General Assembly of that year. The fund was established to primarily assist military families living in Connecticut who are experiencing a financial hardship related to the deployment of a loved one.

As the bill was passed in 2005 the current eligibility requirements were that the family member must, A, reside in the state of Connecticut, be an immediate family member of the service member, and by that I mean either of the spouse, child, parent, or -- or possibly a sibling in certain circumstances. They have to have a quantifiable financial hardship related to the deployment of that service member, and the service member must currently be serving on federal active duty, which is sometimes known as Title X active duty.

The proposed legislation changes would eliminate -- eliminate the fourth requirement of being -- having to be on active duty. This would open up the fund to the families who are

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, experiencing a financial hardship that were caused by a military service of a loved one, but they're no longer serving on active duty. The fund will be available to families of service members who have been injured on active duty, suffering from mental trauma such as PTSD, posttraumatic stress disorder, or any other circumstance that has put the -- put an additional financial burden on that family.

The proposed change would also bring the program into alignment with a federal initiative in the -- called the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program which was enacted as part of the 2008 Defense Authorization Act. The yellow ribbon reintegration program was designed to assist the growing number of veterans that are having difficulty readjusting to life after serving in combat zones.

The military family relief fund is not a required part of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, but the proposed change would ensure that the family members are afforded the availability of the monies, in the fund to assist them while they're service member is meeting the challenges of reintegrating into civilian life.

Understanding that in these difficult times for the state of Connecticut, it's important to assess the financial impact of any programmatic changes of state-funded programs. The military family relief fund was initially sourced with \$500,000 by Public Act 05-3 in 2005. Since then, however, the taxpayers of Connecticut have been contributing to the fund by donating part or all of their refund from their state income tax on Line F of the contribution to designated charity section of

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the various 1040 forms. I provided a chart in my testimony -- and sparing going through all the numbers -- since the -- the inception of the program we've taken in \$193,815.99 in contributions while only expending \$96,641.21 in grants.

So, as you can see, we've had twice as much in contributions as we've had in grants approved. Combined with the initial funding of \$500,000, the balance of the fund is now \$594,174.78 at the beginning of this current fiscal year.

It is important to note that the grants have -- do have a correlation with the number of National Guard units deployed in support of the global war on terrorism. In 2007, we expended the high-water mark of \$50,000, whereas in 2008 where the least amount of units were deployed we only spent \$11,950. Current employment projections showed that 2010 will be a bit -- as busy a year as 2007, but the program -- programmatic changes really won't have any impact until 2011.

So pending any of your questions, that concludes my testimony.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you very much for your testimony. You know, all what's -- what's happening in the global environment and obviously what's happening now, we're moving into Afghanistan and the whole nine yards, is definitely going to be a definite need for the families.

Do we have any idea how many families really have fell onto hard times and are looking for the military relief fund? I mean is -- I'm assuming the trend is -- is going upward instead of remaining level. Could you share

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some insight with that?

RUSSELL BONACCORSO: Sure. Since the program started we've had 88 applications with 63 approvals, and the reason that we had most of those rejections, 25 rejections, was because the soldier was no -- or the sailor, or marine, was no longer on active duty. Families were experiencing a hardship post the active-duty service.

As far as the trends, the trends tend to reflect the units being deployed by the National Guard, the reserves, the Army Reserves, Marine Corps Reserves, kind of have a steady amount always out of the state, but there's been some hills and valleys with the National Guard.

In 2007 we had more applications we did in 2008, so that would tend to -- tend to make you believe the trend is going down, but with more units going out the door, especially the infantries, in January 2010, we expect the applications to go up, and with these contributing financial hardships as well, you know, just that people are experiencing on a normal basis, we can expect that we'll have a significant amount of applications in the -- in the coming years, anywhere from, you know, another 50 to 60 per year.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you. One further question. How long do they normally require the assistance of the Military Relief Fund before they go over the hump, so to speak, or is that just -- I mean what's the average duration, if you will, that really require the fund to contribute to the servicemen and women and their families?

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RUSSELL BONACCORSO: Well, the fund is designed really to be a one-time grant. We don't give out say a steady check and, you know, with the 88 applications, I don't think a single one has been the same. We take a -- there's a committee of six personnel who review every application and we basically determine, at that point, you know, are they eligible? Is it someone we want to help? And then we come up with a dollar amount.

We've had a few repeat applications, but it's less than five. So generally the family -- and so, in that respect, the Family Relief Fund has been doing what it's been designed to do. We've given them the one-time grant, anywhere from a couple hundred to several thousand dollars, and then they don't need to come back, it alleviates the financial stress that they've been having.

REP. GRAZIANI: Terrific. Thank you very much.

Do you have any questions, Frank?

REP. NICASTRO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Russell, question, you say "a couple hundred dollars, so several thousand dollars."

RUSSELL BONACCORSO: Correct

REP. NICASTRO: Now, can that money be used -- do you have specifics where that money has to be used for? Are there guidelines? Or they say, here, you're in need. You've got this money and -- as an example, mortgage payments, doctor bills, whatever --

RUSSELL BONACCORSO: Correct. Right.

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REP. NICASTRO: -- the case may be?

RUSSELL BONACCORSO: We don't have a strict set of guidelines. The guideline is that the hardship has to be related to the deployment. So in other words, if the loved one was home what would be the difference. To use, maybe, mortgage as an example, if the soldier had been home, and you would have got behind on your mortgage anyways then, generally, we wouldn't -- we wouldn't use the fund to help you, we would refer you to other programs. But if it was a situation where, say, the soldier had a high-paying job, and then was deployed making less money, which was causing now a financial hardship, making it difficult to pay that mortgage, then yes, we would pay that mortgage.

And it could go for doctor bills. For example, if they had a job with excellent health insurance coverage and that coverage didn't continue, and now they're on tricare that maybe didn't pay as well, or cover as much, we -- we've done -- for instance, we've had some soldiers who were auto mechanics, so their cars break down, now, you know, husband or son isn't home to fix that car, they have to bring it into a shop. So, generally, to say that the requirement is that we need to somehow relate that hardship to that soldier or airmen or what have you being gone.

REP. NICASTRO: Thank you very much. Thank you.

RUSSELL BONACCORSO: Okay. Thank You.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you.

Okay. Dennis Oparowski -- I hope I pronounced that correctly -- from Lebanon.

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We're going to go out of order because normally, Debbi Newton goes last, so I don't think it's about six o'clock.

Debbi, with your indulgence, I'd like to, if permissible, John Hollis, I see is here.

John?

JOHN HOLLIS: Good morning, Representative Graziani, members of the Veterans Committee. It's always an honor and pleasure to be here.

I'm here to talk about a few bills this morning. I don't know how I got ahead of such an elegant speaker, but I'll stay around and listen to what you have to say. It's usually very, very important.

It's nice to see a couple of bills that is one out of the Governor's office, and one submitted by McKinney and Representative Caruso, An Act Concerning Disabled Veterans Property Tax Exemption, and from the Gov -- and also, An Act Concerning Military Relief Fund. And, of course, when you see the soldier, sailor, marine legislation proposal here -- I just want to say something about the soldier, sailor, marine fund. Recently, I had an opportunity to speak with the director, and I have a very dear friend of mine that is in dire need of some help, he's in ICU Manchester Hospital, life support, and he had an eviction problem, and his wife was blindsided; didn't have a clue that he was going through that, and she received a notice that she had to be out on the 17th which -- and she got notified on the 13th. I cannot even describe the -- the support that the soldier, sailor marine fund had given to this woman, this wife of this --

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at this very critical time. And it's such a pleasure to deal with an organization like that, and to see the support, and the American Legion that is so very, very much involved in that organization, to respond that quickly and to be -- is a credit to them, to this body, and to everybody that has anything to do with that. And I just hope we can continue to support that wonderful, wonderful organization, and -- and -- and fund it, and do whatever -- everything we can, as you can, as Legislators to help keep this. It's just the best of the best.

And I commend Jack Monahan for his leadership in that, and the staff, and the people surrounding that, American Legion, of course. I'd like to say, we, from the Veterans of foreign wars, certainly will be there available to give whatever we can to that, that fine organization and whatever assistance we can.

So that being said, I really didn't have a lot to say other than I support the bills coming out of this committee, and I would be remiss if I didn't come up here and at least say that I thank you, because, you know, these usually get out of this committee, and then the real work begins. So, you know, we know we have your support. So, again, thank you very much allowing me to come up.

And by the way, this is the quickest. I've signed up as late as I have in the past, and at about six o'clock in the evening, I've changed it from good morning, good afternoon, to good evening, and I thought I did one time good night, but I got to say being here in fifteen minutes and getting able to speak, I'm so grateful for that, I can actually go down

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and have lunch.

So if there's any questions, I'll be more than happy to answer anything.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you, John, for your comments. And it's -- it's good to hear the positive things.

JOHN HOLLIS: That's the way it is.

REP. GRAZIANI: You know, a lot of times we hear some negative things, things around the bubble, but very few times do we hear some positive reinforcements that are going on, so it's very important to hear as a Legislative body to see what we can -- see what we can do.

And no, you're not off the hook, because I'm going to allow the speakers to speak for the second time around, if they want to, and I know you never leave this building.

JOHN HOLLIS: Well, Rusty Meek is -- I didn't see him here today and, of course, if we listen we can't hear him, we know he's not here. But if isn't, I think he's heading for a cruise, so if he isn't here we'll forgive the -- our state commander, and if he doesn't show up, I'd like to give you his best, and is -- is very active this year, as his leadership as commander of the Veterans of Foreign War in the activities of this Veterans Committee, so his absence is because he's on a cruise, but he does have a great amount of concern for the issues of Veterans across the State of Connecticut, so he sends his best.

REP. GRAZIANI: Right. And send Rusty our best because, obviously, he's not bashful to pick up the phone and express his opinion, and

that's -- that's what we need.

JOHN HOLLIS: Yeah. He don't --

REP. GRAZIANI: That's what we need.

JOHN HOLLIS: He don't sugarcoat it. (Inaudible) ship as well yours, I might add.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you. Thank you very much.

Any questions for Mr. Hollis?

If not, always a pleasure my friend.

JOHN HOLLIS: Thank you, again, or as in the Navy we did (whistling) sweepers, sweepers, start your brooms, give a clean sweep, done four and half, take all trash and garbage to the fan tail.

REP. GRAZIANI: Dismissed, John.

Is there anyone else from the public?

Debbi would you please step forward, Debbi Newton.

DEBBI NEWTON: I'm not sure I want to follow that. My eloquence is just gone at this point.

SB 860

SB 863 HB 6405

SB 861 HB 6406

HB 6394 HB 6410

SB 862 HB 6408

Good morning, Representative Graziani, and members of the Select Committee on Veterans affairs.

For the record, I am Debbi Newton, legislative chair and past president of the National Guard Association of Connecticut, and a 29-year member of the Connecticut Army/National Guard.

You have several bills before you today that

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NGACT supports, many of which provide clarifications of language in existing statute. Senate Bill 860, An Act Concerning False Representation of Military Status adds the physical display of rank to the list of items made illegal in legislation either last year or the year before.

Senate Bill 863 and House Bill 6405 also clarify language of existing law.

Senate Bill 861, An Act Concerning Retirement from Military Service expands eligibility to enlisted members to apply for the next higher rank within state upon retirement. Officers have been eligible to do this for many years, and they were able to make application to the state to be promoted to Brigadier General if they retired as colonel. This bill would allow enlisted people that qualified to apply for state promotion to the next higher grade upon retirement.

House Bill 6406, An Act Concerning Military Support Program seeks to formalize a relationship between Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Child and Family Services, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. By adding the Department of veterans Affairs to existing law we support this.

House Bill 6394, An Act Concerning Military Family Relief Fund, seeks to expand the pool of those eligible to apply for the assistance from the fund. As you heard Russell speak about this earlier, he mentioned that there were 25 applications that were denied because the military member of the family was not still currently deployed. Expanding it would probably have allowed most of those 25

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applications to have been granted.

House Bill 6410, An Act Concerning Use of Handheld Mobile Telephones by Members of the Armed Forces While Operating a Motor Vehicle does not give carte blanche to any one of us in the military to use our cell phone whenever we feel like it when we're driving. What it does do is it allows us, in the course of our duties, to be able to communicate with higher headquarters. If we're in an emergency situation and we're being sent out to one certain area, something changes, the only way they can get ahold of us is by a cell phone to redirect us to another area where we're needed more, that's what this would allow. It would allow conducting of business. Not us calling home say, hey, we're stopping with the guys to have a couple of beers after work. This is specifically work related.

The two bills I'd like to speak a bit more about are Senate Bill 862, An Act Concerning Members of the National Guard Called to State Active Duty, and House Bill 6408, An Act Concerning Professional Liability Insurance Policies and Members of the National Guard Called to Active Duty.

When a National Guardsman is called to state active duty under current law, most receive their daily military pay plus a \$10 stipend. For some of our more junior soldiers and airmen, this could be as low as \$64.99 per day. Those could be the same citizens of Connecticut that make 20 to 30 dollars an hour at a job as a construction worker or many other areas. These are the same citizens that may receive only a few hours notice that they're being called to state active duty, and have to spend that time getting ready for



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER  
287 West Street  
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Dr. Linda S. Schwartz, RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN  
Commissioner

**TESTIMONY OF DR. LINDA S. SCHWARTZ, COMMISSIONER,**  
Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Submitted to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
February 19, 2009

**HB 6394: AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF FUND**

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am pleased to offer this written testimony on Governor's bill HB 6394, *An Act Concerning the Military Family Relief Fund*, which would expand the eligibility of the Military Family Relief Fund to the immediate family members of any member of the armed forces who is domiciled in the state, including Connecticut National Guard members and Reservists from all services, who have a demonstrated financial hardship. This legislation would remove the current restriction which limits eligibility to Guard and Reserve families only during the period their soldier is away on active duty.

The Military Family Relief Fund, administered by the Connecticut Military Department, awards grants to the immediate family members of eligible, currently-serving service members to help pay for essential personal or household goods or services including, but not limited to, repairs, medical services that are not covered by insurance, transportation, babysitting, clothing, school supplies or any other goods or services that are essential to the well-being of a the family. Grant applications are reviewed and processed within seven days of receipt.

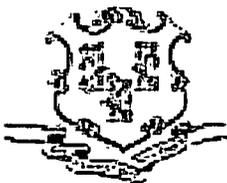
Although the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs has no role in the administration of this valuable Fund, we recognize the Military Family Relief Fund as another important state program to help many families of currently-serving service members – the majority of whom are also

veterans. These are difficult times for military and veterans' families. Our National Guardsmen and Reservists are supplying critical manpower for the Global War on Terror and are shouldering more than their fair share of the nation's wartime burden. Multiple deployments are taking their toll both on the individual veterans and their families left behind. Often, financial pressures associated with the veteran's deployment(s) can add a great deal to the stress of these transitions.

Those financial pressures often do not end when the veteran returns home and comes off active duty. In fact, the transition period following redeployment is often the most stressful and challenging for the veteran and his/her family. Often veterans must adjust to a sudden loss or reduction of income upon returning home: many veterans have health issues that may limit their ability to immediately return to their previous civilian jobs; there may be a delay or employee issues preventing their return to their civilian jobs; benefits and services provided to the family based on the active duty status of the service member are no longer available; and bills or financial issues not appropriately addressed during their deployment may quickly surface. This legislation will enable the Military Family Relief Fund to appropriately help these families of service members who continue to serve whenever the need arises.

Taxpayers contribute to the Military Family Relief Fund through a check-off on their state income tax returns and these funds are managed by the State Treasurer. It is my understanding that because of the generosity of the Connecticut people, the Military Family Relief Fund has been receiving annual revenues from this tax return check-off that exceed application needs and that there is sufficient projected revenue to support this expanded eligibility for many years to come. Additionally, the administrative overhead to manage this Fund is extremely small as required by statute.

This self-supporting Fund is another example of smart, efficient government working for the benefit of veterans and their families. Thank you for your consideration of this bill's merits.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
MILITARY DEPARTMENT  
360 BROAD STREET  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06105-3706



February 19, 2009

Written testimony to the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs in support of House Bill #6394  
**AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY FAMILY RELIEF FUND**

I am Russell J Bonaccorso Jr, the program manager for the Military Family Relief Fund and representing the Connecticut Military Department and the Adjutant General, Major General Thaddeus Martin.

The Military Family Relief Fund was established in 2005 by Public Act 05-3 in the June special session of the Connecticut General Assembly of that year. The fund was established to assist military families in Connecticut who are experiencing a financial hardship related to their military service.

As passed in 2005, the current eligibility requirements are that the family member must:

- a. reside in Connecticut
- b. be an immediate family member of a service member
- c. have a quantifiable financial hardship related to the deployment of the service member

and

- d. the service member must currently be serving on federal active duty, known as Title 10 status.

The proposed change would eliminate the fourth requirement that I stated, opening the fund to families experiencing a financial hardship that was caused by the military service of the loved one, but is no longer serving on Title 10 active duty. The fund will now be available to families of service members who have been injured on active duty, suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or any other circumstance that has put an additional financial burden on the family.

The proposed change would also bring the program into alignment with the Department of Defense's Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, which was enacted as part of the 2008 Defense Authorization Act. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program was designed to assist the growing number of veterans who have been having difficulty readjusting to life after serving in combat zones. The Military Family Relief Fund is not required to be a part of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, but the proposed change would ensue that family members are afforded the availability of the monies in the Military Family Relief Fund to assist them while their service member is meeting the challenges of reintegrating to civilian life.

Understanding that these are difficult financial times for the State of Connecticut, it is important to assess the impact programmatic changes would affect. The Military Family Relief Fund was initially sourced with \$500,000.00 by Public Act 05-3. Since then, the taxpayers of Connecticut have been contributing to the fund by donating part or all of their state income tax refund on line F in the **Contributions to Designated Charities** section of the various state 1040 forms.

The following is a breakdown of the past three fiscal years since the inception of the fund:

| Fiscal Year | Contributions | Grants      | Difference  |
|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2006        | \$47,223.06   | \$33,877.86 | \$13,345.20 |
| 2007        | \$69,245.90   | \$50,812.97 | \$18,432.93 |
| 2008        | \$77,347.03   | \$11,950.38 | \$65,396.65 |
| TOTAL       | \$193,815.99  | \$96,641.21 | \$97,174.78 |

As you can see, we have had twice as much in contributions as we have had in grants approved. Combined with the initial funding of \$500,000.00, the balance in the Military Family Relief Fund was \$597,174.78 at the beginning of the current fiscal year. It is important to note that the grants have a correlation with the number of National Guard units deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism with 2007 being the high water mark and 2008 being the low point since the start of the war. Current deployment projects show 2010 to be almost as busy as 2007 for the National Guard.

Pending your questions, this concludes my testimony.

Sincerely,



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STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

Testimony Submitted to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
February 19, 2009

M. JODI RELL  
GOVERNOR

*M. Jodi Rell*  
*Governor*  
*State of Connecticut*

**Testimony Supporting H.B. No. 6394: An Act Concerning The Military Family Relief Fund and  
S.B. No. 846: An Act Concerning The Disabled Veterans' Property Tax Exemption**

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani, and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs, I thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 6394: An Act Concerning The Military Family Relief Fund and Senate Bill No. 846: An Act Concerning The Disabled Veterans' Property Tax Exemption.

As you know, the Military Family Relief Fund was established in 2005 to assist residents of our state who may be experiencing a financial hardship due to a loved one's military service. Since then, grants to Connecticut's military families from the proceeds of this fund have assisted them in making mortgage or utility payments and in paying for home and automobile repairs.

Although many of the financial hardships associated with military service manifest themselves only after a service member returns home, only families of those serving on active duty may qualify for assistance from the Military Family Relief Fund. House Bill 6394 rectifies this dichotomy by allowing for the provision of assistance to families of service members who, though no longer serving on active duty, are experiencing financial difficulties.

In addition to being financed with state moneys, the Military Family Relief Fund is one of the designated charities to which Connecticut taxpayers may contribute by donating all or a portion of their state income tax refunds. Our state's taxpayers have been very generous in making such donations. As a result, I believe the resources of the Military Family Relief Fund are sufficient to allow for this extension of assistance, and I urge you to support H.B. No. 6394.

The need for Senate Bill No. 846 is due to the United States Veterans Administration's conversion to a new payment system (VETSNET). Under the prior system, the federal agency issued VA Form 20-5455, "Statement from Benefit Payment Records" on an annual basis to veterans with disabilities. These veterans submitted that documentation to assessors so as to substantiate eligibility for their property tax exemptions under §12-81(20) of the Connecticut General Statutes.

Under VETSNET, VA Form 20-5455 is no longer available. Instead, at the request of a veteran the federal agency will issue a letter that will contain information concerning the veteran's percent of disability rating. Essentially, the United States Veterans Administration is changing from an automatic notification system to one that requires veterans to request documentation on an annual basis. There is a greater likelihood that veterans could neglect to request the documentation they need, or that there will be delays in the provision of letters, especially while the federal agency is converting hundreds of thousands of records to VETSNET.



## National Guard Association of Connecticut

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Feb 19, 2009

### **Testimony in regards to Senate Bills 860, 861, 862 and 863 and House Bills 6405, 6406, 6409, 6410 and 6394**

Good morning Senator Maynard, Representative Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am Debbi Newton, Legislative Chair and past-president of the National Guard Association of Connecticut and a 29 year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

You have several bills before you today that NGA CT supports, many of which provide clarifications of language in existing statute. Senate Bill 860, An Act Concerning False Representation of Military Status adds the physical display of rank to the list of items made illegal in legislation last year. Senate Bill 863 and House Bill 6405 also clarify language of existing law.

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Senate Bill 861, An Act Concerning Retirement from Military Service expands eligibility to enlisted members to apply for the next higher rank upon retirement. Officers have been eligible to do this for many years and can make application to the state to be promoted to the next higher grade, or rank, not to exceed Brigadier General. This bill would allow enlisted people that qualify to apply for state promotion to the next higher grade upon retirement.

House Bill 6406, An Act Concerning the Military Support Program seeks to formalize the relationship between the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department Of Child and Family Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs when providing services to Connecticut Veterans by adding the Department of Veterans Affairs to existing law.

House Bills 6409, An Act Concerning Military Families and 6394, An Act Concerning the Military Family Relief Fund both seek to expand the pool of those eligible to apply for assistance from the Fund.

House Bill 6410, An Act Concerning the use of hand Held Mobile Telephones by members of the Armed Forces while Operating a Motor Vehicle does not give members of the armed services carte blanche to use cell phones and other hand held devices while driving whenever they want to. What it does do is give members of the Armed Forces the flexibility of communications while in an official status. Many times we have emergency