

Act Number:	09-176	
Bill Number:	846	
Senate Pages:	1915-1916, 1935-1938	6
House Pages:	9516-9519	4
Committee:	Veterans: 192-195, 206-207, 223-224	8

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
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Seeing no objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Calendar 338, PR.
Calendar 357, Senate Bill Number 995, Mr. President, I
move to refer this item to the Committee on Energy and
Technology.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is to refer to Energy and Technology
Committee.

Seeing no objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Calendar 358, pass
temporarily.

Calendar 362, Senate Bill Number 1113, Mr.
President, I move to place this item on the foot of
the calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Calendar 367 is marked
go.

Calendar 368, Senate Bill Number 846, Mr.
President, I move to place this item on the Consent
Calendar.

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THE CHAIR:

Motion is to place item on Consent.

Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Calendar 372, PR.

Calendar 380, PR.

Calendar 386, Senate Bill Number 913, PR.

Moving to calendar page 38, Calendar 396, House
Bill Number 5841, Mr. President, I move to place this
item on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is on the floor to place the item on the
Consent Calendar.

Seeing no objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. Calendar 404, PR.

Calendar 413, PR.

Calendar 415, pass temporarily.

Calendar 418, PR.

Calendar 422, PR.

Moving to calendar page 39, Calendar 424, PR.

Calendar 427, PR.

Calendar 428, PR.

Calendar 429, PR.

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SENATE

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for House Bill 6643; Calendar 536, Substitute for
House Bill 6685.

Calendar page 15, Calendar Number 539, Substitute
for House Bill 6287.

Calendar page 17, Calendar 553, Substitute for
Senate Bill 885.

Calendar page 20, Calendar 587, Substitute for
House Bill 6598; Calendar 588, Substitute for House
Bill 6324.

Calendar page 21, Calendar 592, House Bill 6439.

Calendar page 27, Calendar Number 135, Senate
Bill 842.

Calendar page 28, Calendar 140, Senate Bill 872.

Calendar page 29, Calendar 175, Substitute for
Senate Bill 617.

Calendar page 30, Calendar 182, Senate Bill 973.

Calendar page 31, Calendar 206, Substitute for
Senate Bill 949.

Calendar page 37, Calendar Number 368, Senate
Bill 846.

Calendar page 38, Calendar 396, House Bill 5841.

Calendar page 42, Calendar 519, Substitute for
Senate Bill 1092; Calendar 375, Substitute for Senate
Bill 1021.

Calendar page 43, Calendar 560, Substitute for House Joint Resolution Number 49; Calendar 561, House Joint Resolution Number 55; Calendar 562, House Joint Resolution Number 58; Calendar 563, House Joint Resolution Number 59.

Calendar page 44, Calendar 564, House Joint Resolution Number 61; Calendar 565, House Joint Resolution Number 66, Calendar 566, Substitute for House Joint Resolution Number 67; Calendar 567, Substitute for House Joint Resolution Number 70; Calendar 568, House Joint Resolution Number 72.

Calendar page 45, Calendar Number 569, House Joint Resolution Number 73; Calendar 570, House Joint Resolution Number 80; Calendar 571, House Joint Resolution Number 82; Calendar Number 572, House Joint Resolution Number 84; Calendar 573, House Joint Resolution Number 85.

Calendar page 46, Calendar 574, House Joint Resolution Number 86; Calendar 575, Substitute for House Joint Resolution Number 94; Calendar 576, House Joint Resolution Number 95; Calendar 577, Substitute for House Joint Resolution Number 96; Calendar 578, House Joint Resolution Number 63.

Mr. President, I believe that completes those

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items placed on the first Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Clerk, if you could please call for a roll call vote, I will open the machine.

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 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 locked.

Mr. Clerk, please call the tally.

THE CLERK:

The motion is on adoption of Consent Calendar
Number 1:

Total Number Voting	36
Necessary for Adoption	19
Those Voting Yea	36
Those Voting Nay	0
Those Absent/Not Voting	0

THE CHAIR:

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May 6, 2009

Consent Calendar Number 1 passes.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, I would move for suspension for immediate transmittal to the House of Representatives of item on calendar page 42, Calendar 519, Senate Bill 1092, An Act Concerning the Client's Security Fund, that was included in the immediately preceding vote on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Motion is to suspend down to the House Calendar 519.

Without objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Yes, thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, as the second order of the day, I would ask the Clerk to call the item on calendar page 22, Calendar 595, Substitute for House Bill 6648.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

Turning to calendar page 22, a matter marked second order of the day, Calendar Number 595, File

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

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law
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

271
June 2, 2009

Total number voting	75
Necessary for passage	75
Those voting Yea	112
Those voting Nay	37
Those absent and not voting	2

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

And the bill passes in concurrence with the Senate. Will the Clerk -- I'm sorry, it's not in concurrence. The bill passes. Will the Clerk please call Calendar number 612.

THE CLERK:

On page 18, Calendar 612, Senate Bill number 846, AN ACT CONCERNING THE DISABLED VETERAN'S PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION favorable report of the Committee on Finance, Revenue, and Bonding.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Graziani, you have the floor, sir.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

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

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

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

Representative Graziani.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all I want to thank -- thank the Governor, or certainly our Veteran's Affair Committee, Commissioner Schwartz, and other veterans organizations for bringing this bill to our attention. What this bill does, Madam Speaker, members of the chamber, is that no longer does it require a disabled veteran which there's roughly 22,000 within our State, to file on an annual basis with the town assessor. And this problem came to light, quite frankly, when the federal VA system changed their computer system.

Therefore none of our disabled veterans were able to receive that letter. What that in fact meant that some of them had to reestablish once again or taken off their \$1,000 exemption based on their disability. So it created a lot of undue hardship for our disabled veterans. This makes it permanent. By that I mean the only time the disabled veteran will have to file with the town tax assessor if there's any change in their disability. So with that, Madam Speaker, I urge passage of the bill. Thank you.

DEPUTY-SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question was on passage of the bill? Will you remark further?

My good friend, Representative John Harkins of the 120, you have the floor, sir.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise in support of the bill. I would like to thank the Governor in her leadership for coming forward with this idea of allowing our disabled veterans to only have to come once in order to apply for a benefit. I'd like to thank Representative Graziani for his support in this bill as well. And I think his explanation sums it. This will once again do something that's really long overdue in helping our disable veterans and I urge support of the bill. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you remark further on this bill? Will you remark further on this bill? 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 voting by roll call.
Members to the chamber.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Have all members voted? Have all 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. Will the Clerk please announce the tally.

THE CLERK:

Senate Bill 846 in concurrence with the Senate

Total number voting 146

Necessary for passage 74

Those voting Yea 146

Those voting Nay 0

Absent and not voting 5

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

And the bill passes.

Representative Melissa Olson from Norwich.

REP. OLSON (46th):

Why thank you, Madam Speaker, so lovely you are on the dais today. Madam Speaker, I move for the immediate transmittal to the Senate of all items acted upon in the House and needing further action in the Senate. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question is on suspension of the rules for the immediate transmittal of all acted on bills in the House needing

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**SELECT
COMMITTEE
ON VETERANS'
AFFAIRS
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hl/gbr SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS 10:00 A.M.

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 remise 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

hl/gbr SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' 10:00 A.M.
AFFAIRS

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.

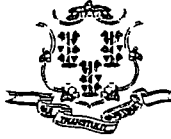
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<u>SB 863</u>	<u>HB 6405</u>
<u>SB 861</u>	<u>HB 6406</u>
<u>HB 6394</u>	<u>HB 6410</u>
<u>SB 862</u>	<u>HB 6408</u>

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



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 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 am pleased to offer this written testimony on Governor's bill HB 846, *An Act Concerning the Disabled Veterans' Property Tax Exemption*, which makes efficient changes to the statutes governing tax assessors and property tax exemptions granted to the state's approximately 22,000 veterans who have a disability rating as determined by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA). Under this change, a disabled veteran who has submitted proof of disability rating to the tax assessor of his/her municipality and has had this exemption granted by the municipal assessor, does not need to resubmit such proof in subsequent years, unless the disability rating is modified by the VA.

This statutory change is necessary to help disabled veterans apply for and maintain their local property tax exemptions and to simplify procedures both for veterans and local tax assessors. Last summer, the VA's Central Office in Washington implemented a new computer/software system which changed some of its previous capabilities to issue correspondence directly to disabled veterans. Disabled veterans had been receiving annual letters from the VA attesting to the continuation of their disability rating for the purposes of submitting these as proof to assessors of continued eligibility for the property tax exemption as required by statute. When the VA Regional Office notified us in the fall they would no longer be able to generate these certification letters to Connecticut's disabled

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veterans, local tax assessors were legally forced to suspend approval of individual property tax exemptions until such letter of proof was received. Although we were able to develop a one-time work around with the VA Regional Office to generate letters to the state's disabled veterans, this issue highlighted to need to modify this cumbersome statute.

This legislative fix will allow municipal tax assessors to continue to grant the disabled veterans property tax exemption for every year following the initial qualification for this benefit without annual verification of the veteran's continued disability. Disabled veterans would be responsible to notify his/her municipal assessor if the VA modifies their disability rating.

In my experience, once a veteran has received a disability rating from the VA, the most frequent modification is to increase the amount of the disability rating, not to decrease it. Although it is possible, rarely do disabled veterans completely lose their disability rating.

This bill will reduce the workload for local assessors and remove a redundant and unnecessary annual filing as a burden of proof from disabled veterans. This bill is a small but important step towards more efficient government regarding access to veterans' benefits. Thank you for your consideration of its merits.



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.

I believe that requiring our disabled veterans to annually request such a letter places an unnecessary burden on them. For that reason I support Senate Bill No. 846, which will allow a disabled veteran to file proof of exemption eligibility only once, unless there is a change in the veteran's percent of disability. Although instances of the United States Veterans Administration changing a veteran's disability rating are rare, they do occur. If the United States Veterans Administration modifies a veteran's disability rating, Senate Bill No. 846 would require the veteran to reestablish eligibility on the basis of the revised rating.

I know that each of you appreciates the sacrifices of our military families and our veterans. I trust that you will support these bills as a means of recognizing those sacrifices and making life a little easier for them. Please do not hesitate to contact my office with any questions you may have. Thank you.