

**PA10-021**

**HB5388**

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children as well. Thank you.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you very much. Thanks for coming.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 202.

THE CLERK:

On page 13, Calendar 202, Substitute for House Bill No. 5388, AN ACT CONCERNING THE HOMELESS FEMALE VETERANS AND BILINGUAL SERVICE OFFICERS, favorable report by the Committee on Human Services.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Distinguished Chairman of the Veterans Committee, Representative Graziani, you have the floor sir.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Thank you very much and good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Good afternoon.

REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Mr. Speaker, I move for acceptance of the joint favorable committee report and passage of the bill.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The question is on acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill.

Will you remark?

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REP. GRAZIANI (57th):

Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members of the Chamber we have two -- one bill that contains two very important things that will help our veteran community.

One, quite frankly, has gone on for too long and that's to study the homelessness of female veterans. Approximately there's over 131 homeless veterans throughout the country, men and women. Of that, approximately four to six percent represent the female population.

The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, Commissioner Schwartz, has agreed to do a study and report back to this General Assembly on January, 2011, of her findings and more importantly what the remedies will be. We will certainly be working in conjunction with the federal government as well that has two facilities in West Haven and New Haven.

But the female population of veterans is constantly growing. We also have to bear in mind that we need facilities that will also take in their dependents, their children. So much is going on in the world today that we can't turn our backs on any veteran, and particularly our female veterans.

And secondly, Mr. Speaker, we have the opportunity to help our Hispanic veterans and their families. Currently there's one VSO to handle over 10,000 -- and I'll repeat that -- 10,000 Hispanic veterans in this state and it's located in West Haven; totally unacceptable.

We have an opportunity here to have another one with no fiscal impact, I might add, none whatsoever, to fill a position that's vacated. We have many of our Hispanic veterans that are currently serving in Iraq, Afghanistan and throughout the world.

With the increase of the veteran population, it not only -- it creates pressure on them, but also on their family members. And remember, a lot of their family members may not speak fluently in English. We need to reach out to help the whole community as well.

Therefore, I urge adoption, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative.

Care to remark further?

Representative Nicastro.

REP. NICASTRO (79th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Good afternoon, sir.

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SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Good afternoon, sir.

REP. NICASTRO (79th):

Mr. Speaker, I stand in strong, strong support of this. If you'll recall to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, last week I told you we have to do more and more for our veterans. And as you can see, what we've heard in the past week alone, we had four more of our Connecticut soldiers overseas wounded from the one 'oh deuce, that's the 102nd National Guard.

And you know, they didn't ask to go over there, but they're doing their duty. And it's not just men that are over there today. It's women that are over there today, too. And if we can put them in harm's way, we have a responsibility to see to it that when they come home that we give them the proper care that they need.

We talk about homeless veterans. You can't imagine what some of those men and women have been through and what they've seen and what they're coming back with, and what their families have to listen to. And then they leave because they can't put up with it, because their insides are ripped out, emotionally and mentally.

And this happens with the female soldiers just as well. You know, if we were talking about females 20 or 30 years ago, we would think this was not possible, but it's true today. The women are -- we've lost many female soldiers -- lost their lives in Afghanistan and Iraq. Just go take a look and see how many we've lost. And you say, how was that possible? Well it's true, ladies and gentlemen.

Women are giving up -- they're making the supreme sacrifice, and many of them are coming home. And when they come home, they're suffering and they're sometimes afraid to let you know. And they keep it inside and the next thing you know they're homeless.

We have a responsibility to step forward and do something about that. Here's your chance to do it today. I urge my colleagues on this. Think about it.

Just this past week alone we had, like I said, four of our service people wounded over there. It's not going to stop there. This war isn't going to end today or tomorrow. And yes, it is a war, sad to say.

Secondly, as far as what the Chairman talked about, about the VSO for the Spanish population. You know, I had -- I thought about that and I thought about it for a long time. And, yes, we do need

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someone else. One person cannot handle 10,000 people. It's a human -- it's impossible. It can't be done. And you know what? It's not going to go away. It's going to get worse.

Until we find out how we can bring this fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq to a successful conclusion, it's not going to go away. We need somebody that can speak another language besides the English language.

If we can send the Spanish population over there to serve our country, then we can take care of them when they come back, too, or their families.

So I stand in strong support of both parts of this bill and ask my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do so.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Kelvin Roldan.

REP. ROLDAN (4th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I stand in strong of this legislation. I'd like to thank Representative Graziani and Nicastro and the committee for bringing this forward. The support in both portions of the

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bill, the homeless population, obviously, in the State of Connecticut has been quite impacted by this recession, but it is a sad state in our nation that we have to specifically address one portion of the women who fight for us and go out of this country to defend our nation.

Latino men and women have defended our nation in every conflict in the freedom of this nation and on our behalf and that of our allies. Those conflicts date back to the founding of this nation to present day Iraq and Afghanistan. Hispanic men and women continue to give their lives so that all of us can benefit from the freedom that they provide.

This particular legislation is similar to a bill I introduced a couple of years ago in support of our Hispanic men and women that require -- and their families that need bilingual services.

I want to thank the Chairman and those of us and -- that are supporting this bill today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative.

Representative Coutu.

REP. COUTU (47th):

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today, and it's great to see the passion from my colleagues on the Veterans Affairs Committee. And I think it's a great thing that we're going to investigate a little bit deeper into the homeless women in the shelter and how we can help our female veterans.

It's very important. As we all know, there's more women serving daily on the front lines and there's more and more with their families, their children who are just sort of being left out. So I think it's great that the State of Connecticut, the Veteran Affairs Committee is stepping up.

Now Section 2 of this bill, I do have a concern under the idea that there is 300,000 veterans in this state. There's a lot of people in this state and there's only eight service officers. So the idea that two of the eight -- potentially it's going to be, for the most part, mandated, have a bilingual capability of Spanish and English.

I just have concerns, because when we're dealing with veterans I think we have to think, who's most qualified, who can provide the service regardless of language. And I've been in these offices, the service

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offices as I returned back from serving. And I can tell you they are -- their primary purpose is to deal with the veterans themselves.

Less than probably three to four percent of the time a family member comes into that room with that veteran. And as a person who has served for 16 years, I know most of the veterans, if not all, know English. Now some of their members in their families may not, but the fact is the primary purpose for this position is to help the veterans.

So the idea that we're potentially catering a bill for two to three percent of the time, to have almost 30 percent of the eight employees will be mandated that they know two languages, it's really not right.

So I have some concerns about that, but overall, this is a good bill and I will support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Thank you, Representative.

Would you care to remark further on the bill?

Would you care to remark further?

If not, staff and guests please come to the well of the House. Members take their seats. The machine

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will be open.

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.

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

Have all the members voted? Have all the members voted? Please check the roll call board to make sure your vote has been properly cast. If all the members have voted the machine will be locked and the Clerk will please take a tally.

Will the Clerk please announce the tally?

THE CLERK:

On House Bill 5388.

Total Number voting 144

Necessary for passage 73

Those voting Yea 144

Those voting Nay 0

Those absent and not voting 7

SPEAKER DONOVAN:

The bill is passed.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 69?

THE CLERK:

On page 4, Calendar 69, House Bill Number 5131,

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Without objection, so ordered.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Mr. President.

Calendar 416 is PR; Calendar 417, House Bill  
Number 5282, Mr. President, move to refer this item to  
the Committee on Public Safety and Security.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

Calendar 418, PR; Calendar 419, House Bill Number  
5303, Mr. President, I move to place this item on the  
consent calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President.

Moving to calendar page 32, Calendar 420 is PR;  
and Calendar 421, House Bill Number 5388, Mr.  
President, move to place that item on the consent  
calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered.

SENATOR LOONEY:

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Bill 5265; Calendar 313, substitute for House Bill  
5002.

Calendar page 20, Calendar 314, House Bill 5201.

Calendar page 24, Calendar 340, substitute for  
Senate Bill 175.

Calendar page 25, Calendar 346, substitute for  
Senate Bill 151; Calendar 350, Senate Bill 333;  
Calendar 371, substitute for House Bill 5014.

Calendar page 26, Calendar 375, House Bill 5320.

Calendar page 27, Calendar 379, substitute for  
House Bill 5278; Calendar 380, substitute for House  
Bill 5452; Calendar 381, substitute for House Bill  
5006; Calendar 382, House Bill 5157.

Calendar page 28, Calendar 384, substitute for  
House Bill 5204.

Calendar page 29, Calendar 395, substitute for  
Senate Bill 127; Calendar 396, Senate Bill 147.

Calendar page 30, Calendar 413, House Bill 5024;  
Calendar 414, substitute for House Bill 5401.

Calendar page 31, Calendar 419, substitute for  
House Bill 5303.

Calendar 32 -- page 32, Calendar Number 421,  
substitute for House Bill 5388; and on calendar page  
34, Calendar 46, substitute for Senate Bill 68;

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Calendar 50, substitute for Senate Bill 17.

Calendar page 35, Calendar 64, substitute for  
Senate Bill 187.

Calendar page 37, Calendar 109, substitute for  
Senate Bill 189.

Calendar page 39, Calendar Number 148, substitute  
for Senate Bill 226.

Calendar page 40, Calendar 182, substitute for  
Senate Bill 218.

Calendar page 41, Calendar 188, substitute for  
Senate Bill 200.

Mr. President, that completes those items placed  
on the consent calendar.

THE CHAIR:

All right. If the Clerk has made an announcement  
that a roll call vote is in progress in the Senate on  
the first consent calendar, the machine will be open.  
Senators may cast their vote.

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.

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THE CHAIR:

Would all Senators please check the roll call board to make certain that your vote is properly recorded. If all Senators have voted and if all votes are properly recorded, the machine will be locked, and the Clerk may take a tally.

THE CLERK:

Motion is on adoption of Consent Calendar Number 1.

Total Number Voting	35
Those voting Yea	35
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	1

THE CHAIR:

Consent Calendar Number 1 is passed.

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

Senator LeBeau.

SENATOR LEBEAU:

Thank you, Mr. President, for a -- for an announcement.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed.

**JOINT STANDING  
COMMITTEE HEARINGS**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
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 sh/gbr SELECT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
 March 2, 2010  
 9:30 A.M.

CHAIRMEN: Representative Graziani  
 Senator Maynard

MEMBERS PRESENT:

SENATORS: Slossberg, Fasano

REPRESENTATIVES:

Nicastro, Guerrera,  
 Sayers, Conroy, Coutu

REP. GRAZIANI: -- to either give testimony verbally or to submit written testimony. So with that, I'll ask my cochair, Senator Maynard, and the other members if they have any comments now or later.

SENATOR MAYNARD: And I'll just say good morning. Welcome to all of our veterans who are here to offer testimony and others in support of our agenda today. We're delighted to welcome you all and I believe my esteemed cochair will welcome our first witness.

REP. GRAZIANI: Let's start with Commissioner Linda Schwartz.

Good morning, Commissioner.

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Good morning. The acoustics. Okay.

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HB 5351

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman. And members of the committee. The Department of Veteran's Affairs is offering testimony today on two bills. The first one is Raised Bill 314, AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY OR VETERAN STATUS ON STATE-ISSUED FORMS AND PUBLICATIONS.

While I do fully support the intent of this

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more people will be looking to use the VA system.

VA has changed the criteria. It's now allowing new enrollments in its programs. So what I would say is that there -- there are a couple of things that we have found out. One, we did -- we were called to a Connecticut Hospital Association meeting in which the allegation was made that our veterans are crowding and -- the emergency rooms of Connecticut.

So I asked how many veterans are we talking about here? And that's exactly what happened. They said nothing. They didn't even ask people if they were a veteran. So they were making an accusation, an allegation, that was really not substantiated with anything. So emergency room, Doctor Elvin from Public Health and I, asked the emergency rooms in the state of Connecticut if they asked if their patients were veterans. And no one -- no one asks, if someone is a veteran when they are treating them. But I think that's a place, an entry point, where it would be important in the health care systems.

But having every state agency put it on every form is just -- it probably would be too much for us at the Department of Veteran's Affairs to -- to handle that and to make sure and make any good use of that.

The second -- the second bill that we are -- is Raised Bill 5388, AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESS FEMALE VETERANS. And let me just say that I have a long history and I'm well known for my advocacy for women veterans and also for homeless. One of the issues that came to light in this particular, the idea of doing a study, I would take that on and attempt to do that,

just for, not only to explore that option, but I -- I would say in this state, we have about 16,000 women veterans. This -- the situation with the homeless is fluid.

Admittedly at Rocky Hill we do have 22 beds set aside in a special area of the -- which has -- their privacy is protected. But we are only for women who are single. You can't have children at Rocky Hill. So I can tell you in the last and as -- as soon as yesterday, a woman veteran with two children came to us. We have been able to help her because of a generous donation made by a former Navy nurse, just for this particular group of -- for women veterans only.

But there really -- because the situation is fluid, it's hard to quantify or conceptualize or actually count even the homeless. And I know that Senator Maynard realizes that because we both are on the Southeastern Connecticut Tenure Committee to End Homelessness. And I've been in the business of homelessness since about 1990. The number of veterans are going down that are homeless on the streets of America. But the group that is fast-rising are women veterans who are getting out of the service. And some of the things that VA and Services are encountering is these women have children and there's just not enough room or place for them to be. So that would be probably one of the biggest goals of what we would attempt to do with -- with this bill.

Those are my comments. I know I -- I refer you to my written statement, but if you have any other questions I'd be glad to answer them.

REP. GRAZIANI: Thank you very much for your testimony, Commissioner.

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done three tours, Iraq, Afghanistan. I was fortunate enough to get a good welcome home, and I thank all the Vietnam veterans and everyone else for giving me that, because if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have received that.

Back to the bill. We're not asking for anything. We just want -- we want the opportunity. The -- there's -- there's set-asides for minorities. Minorities that just came to our country. They didn't put their life on the line for their country. They're not dealing with problems, but they're getting opportunities that we're not. And I just, personally, I don't feel it's right. So I -- I just, I wanted to -- to say how I feel.

And then, if I can just go off. The TBI, I've lost friends from roadside bombs. TBI itself, when they got back home years later. And it sucked. We need committees to take care of all of that stuff. I -- I can't talk.

Sorry.

REP. GRAZIANI: David, you did fine, buddy. You did fine. And thank you again for your service. Remember, you're surrounded by good people.

Any questions?

If not, I think that concludes. Whoa, I see one more here. At the very bottom. Debbie Newton.

DEBBIE NEWTON: Good morning, Representative Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veteran's Affairs. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of several important proposals before you today.

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HB 5352

My name is Debbie Newton and I am the Legislative Chair for the National Guard Association of Connecticut. I have served in that capacity for seven years and am a 30-year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

Let me briefly touch on a couple of bills before you, then I will discuss more fully two specific bills.

Raised Bill 313, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ACCEPTABILITY OF CERTAIN CLAIMS FOR THE VETERAN'S PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION is a bill that is needed. Many veterans over the age of 70, my mother among them, lost their Military Discharge Papers in the 1974 fire that destroyed the storage facility holding all those -- those all-important documents. Without them, many veterans are forced to either do without benefits they are entitled to or to jump through hoops to try and prove they are indeed eligible for them. This loss of records was through no fault of their own and they should not have to suffer the consequences of an event that was far outside of their control.

Raised Bill 314, AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY OR VETERAN STATUS ON STATE-ISSUED FORMS AND PUBLICATIONS will assist in the collection of data and inform our state's veterans of all their benefits and entitlements.

Yesterday, a friend of mine, a former member of the U.S. Naval Reserve, was in Newington to fight for educational benefits he had been told somewhere along the line he was not eligible for. Not only did he find out he was eligible to have his master's degree paid for, but the VA is going back and reburse -- reimbursing him for all his eligible expenses for his

bachelor's degree, and he found he may be eligible for an increase in his disability from 10 percent to 70 percent.

Imagine how much stress this man would have avoided while going through school if he were not worried about paying his bills and taking care of his kids. 314 will help others avoid this situation. And as veterans move into the state, it gives us a way to identify those veterans, so that we can tell them what their benefits are.

Raised Bill 5353, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE ON TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY and Raised Bill 5388, AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESS FEMALE VETERANS are very much needed in light of the past several years.

Both groups of veterans and service members are growing daily and their needs are not being fully met. It is not because of the lack of caring or the lack of a desire to help, it is because of the overwhelming numbers and the fact that we may not have been prepared to provide the care and att these heroes need. The Task Force and Study these bills establish could go a long way in helping us understand and provide assistance to our veterans and service members in need.

NGACT fully supports Raised Bill 5350, AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSURE AND CERTIFICATION CREDITS FOR MILITARY TRAINING, and has proposed this bill for the past two years.

Last year we took a step in the right direction with passage of the CDL bill giving credit for CDL training and licensure in the military for civilian CDLs. This bill continues that common sense application.

Thank you very much, Debbie.

Now has there -- anyone that would like to speak that has not signed up? This is your opportunity.

If not, just for the record, we do have written testimony to read into the record. No, just from, who the agency is. I'm not going through the whole thing. That's why she's good over here. To give me a little elbow every now and then.

We have two letters from the Department of Administrative Services on position on the Set-Aside Program for Veterans that own small businesses. They also submitted written testimony regarding AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY OR VETERAN'S STATUS ON STATE-ISSUED FORMS AND PUBLICATIONS.

SB314

We also have written testimony from the Connecticut Plumbing, Heating and Cooling Contractors of Connecticut, and the Connecticut Heating and Cooling Contractors Association. And they are testifying on 5350.

And the last one, we have a brief letter from the Department of Public Health regarding House Bill 5350, AN ACT CONCERNING LICENSES AND CERTIFICATION CREDITS FOR MILITARY TRAINING, which, in fact, they support.

Yes, Senator Slossberg.

SENATOR SLOSSBERG: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to ask the Chairman's indulgence. There was a forum held last evening at Housatonic Community College concerning

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homeless female veterans and I believe that there's probably a bunch of very interesting information that would be useful to the committee.

So if -- with the Chairman's indulgence if we could obtain that and some of that information and documentation, I think it may be helpful with our work on that particular issue. So while we don't have it here, and I recognize that the public hearing will be closed, I would just ask for the ability for the -- whether it's the clerk or myself, to get that information to the committee and that that be accepted as public testimony on that particular bill.

REP. GRAZIANI: Absolutely. And thank you very much for bringing that to our attention. Absolutely, Senator Slossberg.

Is there any other comments?

If not, thank you for coming here and spending your time and sharing what had to be said, in behalf of these bills.

With that, we'll close the public hearing and we'll -- we'll convene the committee in what do you want to do, ten minutes, fifteen?

All right. We'll do -- there was some lobbying behind the microphone over here now, so, why don't we just take just a three-minute break, a five-minute break, and then we'll convene the committee meeting.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
 DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
 OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER  
 287 West Street  
 Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067

Dr. Linda S. Schwartz, RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN  
 Commissioner

**TESTIMONY OF COMMISSIONER LINDA S. SCHWARTZ,  
 RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN**  
 Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs  
 Presented to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
 March 2, 2010

HB5388

Chairman Maynard, Chairman Graziani and distinguished members of the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am Dr. Linda S. Schwartz, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans' Affairs (CT DVA), and I am pleased to offer testimony this morning on two bills before your committee.

**RB 314: AN ACT CONCERNING MILITARY OR VETERAN STATUS ON  
 STATE-ISSUED FORMS AND PUBLICATIONS**

I fully support the intent contained in RB 314. Screening for veterans is a critical step in the process to connect them to benefits. Asking individuals if they have ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces is especially important for individuals seeking health care treatment, those involved with the legal system and those seeking social services assistance.

However, I am concerned about the scope and design of this legislation and the likely administrative hurdles and costs state agencies will face in implementing its intent. Under this legislation, all state agencies will include a military service/veteran screening question in future forms distributed to the public and be required to forward names and addresses to the DVA for entry into our Veterans Registry database.

Our experience shows that if an administrative requirement is too burdensome, it will not produce the desired results. Section 27-100c of the general statutes already calls for municipal tax assessors to forward to our agency the names and addresses of all veterans registered on their tax rolls. Unfortunately, this is an unfunded mandate and there is no standard software program used by all tax assessors to capture and organize this data in a format that clearly identifies only veterans and not their survivors. We are left with data that cannot be easily manipulated and that requires an inordinate amount of staff time to utilize.

9.

The CT DVA already makes proactive contact with the large majority of veterans coming off active duty. We receive copies of all discharge certificates for veterans who claim Connecticut as their home and send out personalized packets containing benefits and contact information. Additionally, our Veterans Registry continues to grow through the popularity of the Veterans Wartime Service Medal Program. We currently have nearly 24,000 entries in the Veterans Registry.

Although additional names and addresses of Connecticut veterans would always be welcomed, I am more concerned with other state agencies and service providers being able to identify veterans in their daily work. It is more important that a state trooper, emergency room technician or state social worker be able to immediately identify a veteran who may be in need. Enabling front-line state workers to immediately identify a client in need as a veteran and to facilitate a connection with our agency is what we are trying to achieve.

To that end, I would propose an alternative identification program currently in use in several other states that would allow current members of the Armed Forces and veterans to receive a distinguishable mark or symbol on their driver's license. Just like we currently do for organ donors, this symbol – such as a “V” for veteran or a U.S. Flag – would immediately identify someone as a veteran to all who examine their driver's license. Such a symbol would be a valuable identification tool for law enforcement officers, medical personnel and social service outreach workers.

I recommend that in this time of limited state resources, that we look towards piloting a similar driver's license veterans identification program rather than producing mounds of forms and data entry that may or may not benefit Connecticut's veterans.

### **RB 5388: AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESS FEMALE VETERANS**

RB 5388 recognizes the special needs and concerns of female homeless veterans – as does the Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs.

For many years, state statute has required that we have an accredited female veteran benefits counselor on our Advocacy and Assistance outreach staff. Additionally at the State Veterans' Home in Rocky Hill, we maintain a dedicated wing for homeless female veterans with 22 available beds. We currently have six female veterans staying with us. However, due to the



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Dr. Linda S. Schwartz, RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN  
 Commissioner

nature of the veteran population and facilities at Rocky Hill, we are unable to accommodate veterans – men or women – with dependent children.

Currently across the state, there are approximately 300 supportive housing units in operation or development that are targeted to veterans, with the large majority being open to both males and females. National data does indicate that homeless women veterans are the most rapidly expanding population with the most unmet needs. My support and advocacy for women veterans and veterans who are homeless is well known throughout the nation. The Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs welcomes the opportunity to assess the population of women veterans in our state who are in need of housing assistance. However, I would caution that estimating the number of homeless veterans in Connecticut is not an exact science. The seasonal and transient nature of homelessness in our state complicates the process. We do know that approximately 131,000 veterans are homeless on the streets of America on most nights and that 4% to 6% of these veterans are women.

Clearly, the most significant need nationwide and in Connecticut is for supportive housing for female veterans with children. Due to the generosity of a woman veteran donor, we have been able to offer limited financial support to women with children who contact the Department.

On a national level, the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs has recognized the need for more transitional and supportive housing programs for homeless female veterans and is making available more grants beginning this year.

Our Federal VA partners do offer specialized services for female veterans in Connecticut. The VA Connecticut Health Care System operates a dedicated Women's Health Care Center in West Haven and a Women's Health Clinic in New Haven. The VA's Vet Centers which provide confidential, one-on-one and group counseling also employ female counselors who are specialists in treating victims of sexual trauma. And the West Haven VA's Errera Community Care Center offers a variety of support programs to both male and female veterans in need.

There are substantial resources available to women veterans in Connecticut and we would be pleased to outline those resources in a report to the Select Committee on Veterans' Affairs as required by this legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on these pieces of legislation. I would be pleased to address any questions that you may have.

TEL: (860) 721-5818, FAX: (860) 721-5919

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## National Guard Association of Connecticut

360 Broad Street, Hartford, CT 06105-3795  
www.ngact.com ngact2005@yahoo.com (860) 247-5000

March 2, 2010

### **Testimony in Favor of Raised Bills 313, 314, 5350, 5352, 5353 and 5388**

Good morning Sen. Maynard, Rep. Graziani and members of the Select Committee on Veterans Affairs and thank you for this opportunity to speak on behalf of several important proposals before you today. My name is Debbi Newton and I am the Legislative Chair for the National Guard Association of Connecticut. I have served in that capacity for the past seven years and am a 30-year member of the Connecticut Army National Guard.

Let me brief you on a couple of the bills before you, then I will get discuss more fully two specific bills.

**Raised Bill 313, ACC the Acceptability of Certain Claims for the Veterans' Property Tax Exemption** is a bill that is sorely needed. Many Veterans over the age of 70, my mother among them, lost their Military Service Discharge Papers in a fire that destroyed the storage facility holding those all-important records. Without them, many Veterans are forced to either do without benefits they are entitled to, or to jump through hoops to try and prove they are indeed eligible for them. This loss of records was through no fault of their own and they should not have to suffer the consequences of an event that was far outside of their control.

**Raised Bill 314: ACC Military or Veteran Status on State-Issued Forms and Publications** will assist the Department of Veterans Affairs collect data and inform our state's Veterans of all of their benefits and entitlement. Yesterday a friend of mine, a former member of the US Naval Reserve, was in Newington to fight for educational benefits he had been told somewhere along the line he was not eligible for. Not only did he find out he was eligible to have his Masters' Degree paid for, but the VA is going back and reimbursing him for all his eligible expenses for his bachelor's degree, and he found he may be eligible for an increase in his disability from 10% to 70%. Imagine how much stress this man would have avoided while going through school if he were not worried about paying his bills. 314 will help others avoid this situation. By providing a check off box on state forms, you avoid the privacy issue associated with having the military provide the names and addresses of veterans getting out of the military, and as veterans move into the state, it enables us a way to identify them and provide them the information they need as well.

Raised Bill 5353: An Act Establishing a Task Force on Traumatic Brain Injury and Raised Bill 5388: ACC Homeless Female Veterans are very much needed in light of the past several years. Both groups of Veterans and Servicemembers are growing daily and their needs are not being fully met. It is not because of a lack of caring or the lack of desire to help, it is because of the overwhelming numbers and the fact that we were not prepared to provide the care and attention these heroes need. The Task Force and Study these bills establish could go a long way in helping us understand and provide assistance to our Veterans and Servicemembers in need.

NGACT fully supports Raised Bill 5350: ACC Licensure and Certification Credits for Military Training, and has proposed this bill for the past two years. Last year we took a step in the right direction with passage of the CDL bill giving credit for CDL training and licensure in the military for civilian CDLs. This bill continues that common sense application. Many of our Servicemembers go to military schools to become plumbers, electricians, carpenters, mechanics, diesel mechanics, aircraft mechanics, medical professionals and spend months doing nothing but learning their chosen crafts or professions, with some training lasting more than a year. When they complete their training, they are deemed as professionals by the United States Government and are sent around the country and the world to practice their specialties. But when they return to a National Guard or Reserve Unit or come home after completing an active duty tour, they are told that what they have learned, what they have been doing, doesn't count and they have to go to tech schools, they have to become apprentices, they have to pay to take training that our tax dollars already paid for them to have. What this bill does is give credit for that training towards licensure and certification in the State of Connecticut. It does not alleviate the need for these Servicemembers to take any state-specific courses that deal with such topics as state building codes, nor does it negate the need to pay any licensing or certification fees. What it does do is give credit for training/schooling already completed through the military and has the potential to put many people into the employable workforce much quicker than they might otherwise be. NGACT urges your full support of this bill.

Finally, I want to speak to Raised Bill 5352: An Act Proclaiming March 30<sup>th</sup> to be Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day. I am, quite frankly, embarrassed, and ashamed, to be speaking about this bill today. I have been in the military for 30 years. Thirty years. Let me say that one more time...30 years. The last Vietnam Veteran came home a few years before I enlisted in the military and we are just now talking about welcoming them home? I realize the people in this room are not necessarily responsible for this outrageous delay, and in fact, at least two of you on this committee are Vietnam Vets, and I want to thank you for your service, for helping preserve my right to wear the uniform of the United States Army.

As a young girl, I remember being in the car with my parents and two of my younger brothers heading to Little Neck Long Island to visit my aunt and uncle. It was late because we had to wait for my dad to get out of work so we could go. Suddenly, my dad pulled the car over to the side of the road and asked a young man where he was headed. That young man was a US Navy sailor and was walking home from the train station because he didn't have the money to go any further on the train or to get a bus ticket. He had been walking along the highway for an hour, carrying his duffle bag before my dad stopped. He told the Sailor to get in the car and drove him over an hour out of our way to get him home safely and it was after midnight when we stopped. I was brought up with that kind of example of how we treat our veterans, our troops. As a young child, I thought that's how everyone treated our military members.