

PA13-34

HB5388

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2013**

**VOL.56
PART 6
1695 – 2023**

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DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The bill as amended passes.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 336.

THE CLERK:

Yes, Madam Speaker. On Page 28 of today's Calendar, House Number, House Calendar Number 366, Favorable Report of the Joint Standing Committee on Planning and Development, Substitute House Bill 5388
AN ACT REQUIRING CITIES AND TOWNS TO DESIGNATE A
VETERANS' SERVICE CONTACT PERSON.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Jack Hennessey, you have the floor, sir.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Thank you, 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 and passage of the bill. Representative Hennessey, you have the floor, sir.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. What this bill does is mandate that all 169 municipalities across the state

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has a point person in which a veteran can go to town hall and find out what is available with state benefits.

This bill requires that an employee is the point person so that there's always somebody there for a veteran. We pass a lot of good bills and sometimes people don't know about it. So this will require that people understand the benefits that Connecticut presents.

Madam Speaker, the Clerk has an amendment, LCO 5978. I would ask that the Clerk please call the amendment and that I be granted leave of the Chamber to summarize.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Will the Clerk please call LCO Number 5978, which will be designated as House Amendment Schedule "A".

THE CLERK:

LCO 5978 as offered by Hennessey and Leone,
Schedule "A".

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The Representative seeks leave of the Chamber to summarize. Is there objection? Is there objection? Seeing none, hearing none, Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

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Thank you, Madam Speaker. What this Amendment does is it clarifies certain points. Instead of regional planning organization, which constitutes a number of municipalities, that's stricken, so that it's just a simple town-by-town basis.

And it also strikes a mandate that each municipality would send someone to the State National Guard for training, and it makes it permissive.

I move adoption.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The question before the Chamber is on adoption. Will you care to remark further on the Amendment before us? Will you care to remark further on the Amendment?

Representative Yaccarino on the amendment.

REP. YACCARINO (87th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of the Amendment because it relieves a mandate on a town. It's up to the town to send a man or woman from the town for the training, so I support the Amendment wholeheartedly and I hope the whole Chamber would. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

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Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on House Amendment Schedule "A"? Will you care to remark further on "A"?

If not, let me try your minds. All those in favor please signify by saying Aye.

REPRESENTATIVES:

Aye.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

All those opposed, Nay? The Ayes have it. The Amendment is adopted.

Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Nicastro of the 79th.

REP. NICASTRO (79th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we've thought a lot about this bill. It passed through two committees unanimously.

In Bristol, we're very fortunate. We have an Army Strong center. There's only six in the entire United States of America, Madam Speaker, and it's used by a lot of towns.

But what this bill could do by having a designee from each, a representative from each city, they could also work with our Army Strong. There is really

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technically no cost to this, if you think about it, and we have so many veterans coming home that really need help and guidance.

I think it's a fine idea. I would ask my colleagues to strongly support this. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further? Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Candelora, you have the floor.

REP. CANDELORA (86th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I may, a question to the proponent of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed.

REP. CANDELORA (86th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I read the language in this bill, these individuals that are to carry out the veterans' services, the duties can be performed by somebody that's associated with a regional planning organization as defined in Lines 53 through 54.

So would that include Counsel of Governments as well in that definition of a regional planning agency?

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Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, through you. The Amendment removes regional planning organizations completely.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Candelora.

REP. CANDELORA (86th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate that. I missed that in the reading.

So as the bill is as amended, then it would be the responsibility of each city and town to designate somebody to perform these services? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, yes.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Candelora.

REP. CANDELORA (86th):

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Thank you, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the answer.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark further? Representative Ackert of the 8th District, you have the floor.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and just a couple of questions to the proponent of the bill.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you. Was there any coordination as a member of the, myself as a member of the American Legion that does a quite job of educating their local communities and the VFW, was there any coordination and input from those groups?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, this bill is kind of silent as far as what's already occurring. A lot of

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municipalities are already doing this and organizations.

This just affirms that every town city hall will have somebody there that can speak knowledgeably about what's offered veterans. Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. So then, by that answer, if there is, like I was a member of the Veterans' Administration Committee, but we did nothing in that department, in that commission that resembles what you're asking in this bill.

So possibly, that that would be something that a town would say now is under your jurisdiction?

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, this bill simply clarifies the access of information so that anyone can go to a town hall and not have to seek out, they can be immediately directed to the point person

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who will act as a conduit. Through you, Madam
Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Ackert.

REP. ACKERT (8th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the
good gentleman. I, like many of us, support the need
to help the individuals that are returning home and
will support this.

I just sometimes wonder, you know, if there's
already people out there that are doing this good work
that they be included in the coordination of efforts,
rather than, and I know this has been relieved of the
overall mandate, but through you, Madam Speaker, I
appreciate the effort to speak, and thank you to the
good gentleman.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further
on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark
further on the bill as amended? Representative
Klarides of the 114th.

REP. KLARIDES (114th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, through you, a question
to the proponent.

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DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed.

REP. KLARIDES (114th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I certainly support anything that supports our veterans in any we can.

But I was just curious. Where did this come from? Did we feel our veterans, our statewide organizations were not doing the job properly? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Through you, Madam Speaker. The Legislature passes lots of bills for veterans and unfortunately, they can get lost within the bureaucratic existence of state and cities, towns, and so what this seeks to do is simply simplify the access of information to coordinate so that there's one person in each town that basically is an expert.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Klarides.

REP. KLARIDES (114th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and if we're considering them experts, all we're saying is that we need to designate one employee from the town. I just want to make sure that that person that's designated is knowledgeable enough to do the job that we need them to do.

Would there be any parameters or qualifications for that person who's chosen? Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, this person will simply understand the scope of the benefits that are available to veterans and then that person can apply to the different organizations benefits.

But it's simply to be a conduit. I kind of overstated. It's not an expert in veterans' affairs or benefits. It's simply someone who knows where the benefits are and directs the veteran. Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Klarides.

REP. KLARIDES (114th):

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Thank you, Madam Speaker, and one last question to the Chairman.

I know in Line 50 the Amendment changes the word shall to may to complete the annual training course. Will anybody be at a disadvantage if they do not take that course and the knowledge that they have in this capacity?

Through you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

Through you, Madam Speaker, I would imagine that anyone that takes this position has a personal interest in it. Probably this person is a veteran, so it is a permissive thing so that it's not a mandate or the city or the towns, but I'm sure that every person that's doing this job throughout the state will be well versed.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Klarides.

REP. KLARIDES (114th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the gentleman for his answers and the Committee for the work they've

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done. I think anything we can do as a state and in our municipalities to give the veterans who are coming back and have served this country and this state what they need. We should all support. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, madam. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark further? Representative Alexander, you have the floor, sir.

REP. ALEXANDER (58th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Sorry for the technical difficulty.

I just briefly wanted to speak in favor of this bill and the good work the Veterans Committee has done, as someone who has returned, obviously, off active duty recently.

There is a need, in my opinion, for a veterans service contact person in each municipality because historically, the veterans organizations like the American Legion, the VFW fulfilled this duty and you would have veteran service officers in each of these organizations fulfilling this role.

Unfortunately, for a younger generation, that's why I rise to speak, for a younger generation of

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veterans returning, they tend not to join the American Legion. I'm a member of an American Legion Post in my town and I'm the youngest member by far, and that is not a good thing. I wish we have more younger members but we don't.

And a lot of younger men and women coming home from the military don't reach out to these veterans' organizations, but they still have questions and this would provide an opportunity for them to get the information they need.

They can go to their town hall when they're doing business and speak to somebody and that person, like Representative Hennessey said, could be that conduit, so they could get in touch with someone for instance, with the Step Up Program, about opportunities for veterans.

So this is a wonderful idea. It's a needed idea. Connecticut is expecting 5,000 to 6,000 young veterans coming home in the next couple years. That's what the Governor's office statistics are showing, due to the drawdown in force strength nationwide. We need to prepare for that. This is a proper step in that direction to help get veterans readjusted to our

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state, get them into the workforce, get them the help they need.

Unfortunately, they don't reach out to the American Legion, VFW posts like they used to, and this would be a proper avenue approach for them to go and get the assistance they need. Thank you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Michael Alberts of the 50th. You have the floor, my friend.

REP. ALBERTS (50th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I may, a couple questions to the proponent.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Please proceed.

REP. ALBERTS (50th):

Thank you. As I understand the bill now amended that's before us, Section 2 basically provides for folks that are not municipal employees to serve in this capacity.

Is that not correct? Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Hennessey.

REP. HENNESSEY (127th):

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Through you, Madam Speaker, negative. This bill will have a city municipal employee be the contact person.

Through you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Representative Alberts.

REP. ALBERTS (50th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I guess that's the part of this bill that really disturbs me. Unlike the previous speaker, the American Legion Post in my community is very active and we have many folks who are not municipal employees who are members of that Post, who I think could function in this capacity very well.

So I'm very disturbed by the fact that we are proposing to establish a mandate even though there's permissive language in the bill now amended before us, it will be very easy to make an adjustment down the road.

So I'm concerned about it. I think that we, as public officials, as State Representatives and State Senators have a responsibility to disseminate this information. If this information is not getting out there in terms of the programs that are available,

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then somehow we are failing in our responsibilities and I'm very hesitant to shift that burden onto municipalities.

So for that reason, Madam Speaker, I'll listen to the debate, but I'm likely to vote against this.

Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87th):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of this bill and as amended.

What it does basically, it's a public service announcement from the Department of Veterans Affairs to the municipalities. Every municipality has a community service department, and that person, he or she, will have the information from the Department of Veterans Affairs to give it to the servicemen and women that are coming home.

So I think it makes a lot of sense. As far as what Representative Alberts says, we have to coordinate us Representatives and Senators between our community services and Department of Veterans Affairs

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and the VA and our community, and our American Legion
in our community.

But that's up to us. But overall, this bill is a
very good bill. It makes a lot of sense and I think
we should support it. Basically, a conduit, a public
service announcement between the towns and the
Veterans Administration.

So many men and women are coming home that need
the help of us as state government and also officials
and citizens of the same state, so I hope you, and I
urge you to support this bill. Thank you.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further
on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark
further? Representative Adinolfi, you have the floor,
sir.

REP. ADINOLFI (103rd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. This bill is good. It
is a little redundant, but it is good. The reason I'm
saying that is that many towns already have a designee
for veterans. In each Congressional District, there
is an office that you can call. That's their sole
job, is to answer questions for health claims and so
on.

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And where the most responsive people I've found, when you contact them, is the Veterans Administration, whether you call Newington or West Haven, the response is great, whether it's on the phone or by e-mail.

So the information is out there and I would think like in Cheshire, we have a Veterans Council and if there is any information that they need, they will just act as the go between, between the VA directly and you.

So I don't look at this as a mandate. They may do it. I believe that most towns are doing it now and passing this bill would just make it a little better because it would remind the municipalities that they might have a responsibility to their veterans if they're not already doing this now. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Aman of the 14th, you have the floor, sir.

REP. AMAN (14th):

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm also speaking in favor of the bill. I was very glad to see the way it was amended and changed that the training

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and things are no longer a mandate for the town, but is more in a may.

I believe that the state, or the local representative is primarily going to be a keeper of a phone list to tell the veterans when they have a problem who they can contact. Our town has a very active American Legion Post. Our Human Services Department I'm sure is aware of most of the veterans things that are going on.

But I was very surprised, I've run two of them over the years, of a Veterans Night to just come in and answer questions, and when I did the first one, I anticipated oh, 10 or 15 veterans showing up for a few questions. Much to my surprise, the hall was overflowing. We probably had better than 125 veterans showing up with questions.

Did it a year later and again, I said, well, we got all those questions answered the first time, we'll have a small crowd. And once again, we had well over 125 individuals show up with a variety of questions. The vast majority of them, though, were answered by saying we have the State Veterans Advocate, this is his phone number. Or, this is the phone number for this group or that group that can help you.

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So I don't think it's an overly big burden on a town, but for a veteran coming in and not knowing where to contact, for us it's all pretty obvious. You contact your State Legislator, you contact a Congressman.

But what happens in real life with people coming back is, they probably go to the town hall to register to get their property tax deduction for being a veteran, and that is about what they know about how to get veterans' benefits.

So by just having someone in the town complex that has a list of phone numbers I think that there are going to be major benefits for certain veterans, so thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Representative Tim Bowles of the 42nd, you have the floor, sir.

REP. BOWLES (42nd):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this. I would like to speak very strongly in support of this particular proposed legislation, and I want to bring the perspective as a

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selectman going on my fourth year, second term in the
Town of Preston.

As a selectman, I have received a number of
inquiries from returning vets, particularly from the
Afghanistan and Iraqi wars and I have some
difficulties in answering their questions to the full
degree that I would be satisfied with. So frequently,
I ultimately am referring them to outside resources,
to Congressman Courtney's office or other resources
that I'm aware of.

I think the idea of having somebody dedicated, a
volunteer, a fellow resident, a veteran in our
community, I think this is an excellent idea and look
forward to going ahead and in my role as a selectman,
identifying such an individual. I think it would be
very helpful to have somebody help veterans returning
to navigate the system.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further
on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark
further on the bill as amended? Representative
Rovero, you have the floor, sir.

REP. ROVERO (51st):

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Okay, I think we're on now. I'd like to rise in support of this bill. I see a lot of bills that come through here that I personally think are a little on the foolish side, but this is one bill that I have to say that really deserves a quick passage.

I was mayor of a small town for quite a number of years and we had a part-time service officer in our building one day a week. That's all it required. Very little cost to the town, and I can't tell you how often a veteran went from downstairs speaking to this officer to upstairs to my office and thanked me for providing this service to him.

So I hope everyone here gives their full support because it's going to be a very little cost to all the towns. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Thank you, sir. Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark further on the bill as amended? Will you care to remark?

If not, staff and guests please come to the Well of the House. Members take your seats. The machine will be opened.

THE CLERK:

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The House of Representatives is voting by Roll.

The House of Representatives is voting by Roll.

Will Members please return to the Chamber
immediately.

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

Have all Members voted? Have all Members voted?
If all the Members have 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:

Bill Number 5388 as amended by House "A".

Total Number Voting	145
Necessary for Passage	73
Those voting yea	144
Those voting nay	1
Those absent and not voting	5

DEPUTY SPEAKER ORANGE:

The bill as amended passes.

Will the Clerk please call Calendar Number 64.

THE CLERK:

Madam Speaker, on Page 4, Calendar Number 64,
Favorable Report of the Joint Standing Committee on

HB 5601

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SENATE**

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PART 8
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THE CHAIR:

Without objection, so ordered. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 16, Calendar 442, substitute for Senate Bill number 978, AN ACT CONCERNING SUBCONTRACTOR PREQUALIFICATION AND CLASSIFICATION THRESHOLDS AND INCREASING THE THRESHOLD FOR REQUIRING COMPETITIVE BIDDING OF PUBLIC WORKS PROJECTS, favorable report of the Committee on Government, Administration and Elections. And there are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, if that item might be passed temporarily and if the Clerk would then call from Calendar page 18, Calendar 468, House Bill 5388.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 18, Calendar 468, substitute for House Bill number 5388, AN ACT REQUIRING CITIES AND TOWNS TO DESIGNATE A VETERANS' SERVICE CONTACT PERSON, favorable report of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Leone.

SENATOR LEONE:

Thank you, Mr. President. I move acceptance of the joint committee's favorable report and passage of the bill in concurrence with the House of Representatives.

THE CHAIR:

On acceptance and passage in concurrence will you remark?

SENATOR LEONE:

Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen of the Chamber, this is a very good bill that is coming out of the Veterans' Affairs Committee with a lot of assistance from my Senate Ranking Member, Senator Welch as well as on many other bills. But this one holds something dear to us in the fact that it extends the outreach services for veterans to every city and town.

And it will require municipalities that do not have a local veterans' advisory committee or person to have someone that will be designated to handle and be their veterans' service contact person. In -- in addition to that the bill also requires that the Department of Veterans' Affairs will conduct annual training course for -- for any such contact persons, does not require them but will allow them to complete that course so that they can provide a first point of contact for any member of any community instead of having to search out any urban center or calling toll free hotlines and so forth.

And as many people know sometimes a local contact is the best way to get issues addressed or at least pointed in the right direction. And this bill attempts to do just that. So I would urge support and passage of the bill. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Senator Welch.

SENATOR WELCH:

Thank you, Mr. President. I too rise to support this bill and I thank Senator Leone for bringing forward this good idea. You know the -- with two conflicts going on and no seeming end to conflict in the world it's becoming more and more important that we service

the needs of our veterans. The fact that veterans will now be able to have a local contact who will be able to direct them to the services that are available to them is absolutely critical especially as we continue to rely more and more on our reserves and guardsmen and we have a number of men and women still in the community deploying, coming back to the community, deploying again.

So there are a lot of needs out there and this is just a -- I think a prudent and cost effective way to make sure that those needs are being met through services that already exist. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Will you remark further on the bill? Will you remark further on the bill? Senator Leone.

SENATOR LEONE:

Thank you, Mr. President. Again I want to thank Senator Welch for all of his support and efforts. We couldn't do it without his assistance. Also if there is no objection I would move to place this item on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objection, so ordered. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page 27, Calendar 565, substitute for House Bill number 6346, AN ACT REVISING VARIOUS STATUTES CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, favorable report of the Select Committee on Children.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Bartolomeo.

SENATOR BARTOLOMEO:

Thank you, Mr. President. I move acceptance of the joint committee's joint favorable report and I urge

THE CHAIR:

The bill passes in concurrence with the House.

Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, if would mark all items previously marked go should be marked passed retaining their place on the Calendar. And if the Clerk would call the items on the Consent Calendar so that we might proceed to a vote on the Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On page five, Calendar 229, Senate Bill 1027, Calendar 232, Senate Bill number 984. On Calendar page nine, Calendar 336, House Bill 6529, Calendar 337, House Bill 5310. Also on page nine Calendar 338, House Bill 6313 and Calendar 339, House Bill 6315. On page ten, Calendar 345, House Bill 5970. And on page 13, Calendar 393, Senate Bill number 872. Page 18, Calendar 468, House Bill 5388. Page 27, Calendar 561, House Bill 6641 and Calendar 565, House Bill 6346. And on page 40, Calendar 302, Senate Bill 1016.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Mr. Clerk. The machine will be opened, vote on a Consent Calendar.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate. Senators please return to the Chamber. Immediate roll call on today's Consent Calendar in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Have all members voted? Have all members voted?
Please check the board and make sure your vote has
accurately recorded. If all members have voted the
machine will be closed and the Clerk will announce the
tally.

THE CLERK:

On today's Consent Calendar.

Total Number Voting	36
Necessary for Adoption	19
Those voting Yea	36
Those voting Nay	0
Those absent and not voting	0

THE CHAIR:

Consent Calendar 1 passes. Senator Looney.

SENATOR LOONEY:

Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, before
moving for moving for adjournment for today would like
to announce that we will likely be in -- in session
next week Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday and also
possibly Friday so members should reserve those four
days next week as -- as possible or probable session
days. At this point, Mr. President, would yield the
floor to members for announcements of committee
meetings or for other points of personal privilege.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you, Senator. Before we do that I would like to
just to take the privilege of -- May is a big birthday
month and we have one of our members who is
celebrating her birthday tomorrow. I would like to
wish Senator Bye a happy birthday tomorrow and I'm
trying to figure out if her birthday wish was granted
as she's not here as she would have liked to have been
here. But happy birthday.

And there is a bipartisan fruit in the caucus room for
Senator Bye because she didn't want a cake so we got
her some fruit that's -- that she requested. So

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In conclusion I would just like to say what -- I'd just like to say without veterans, none of us would be here, and we would not have that great country that we all enjoy. God bless all the veterans and God bless America. Thank you.

REP. HENNESSY: Thank you, sir. Is there any questions from the Committee?

Thank you very much for your testimony.

BRUCE GAUNYA: You're welcome.

REP. HENNESSY: Next I would like to call Commissioner Schwartz. I'd also like to say that after Commission Schwartz that we would be instituting a three-minute time limit for testimony.

COMMISSIONER LINDA SCHWARTZ: Thank you, Mr.

Chairman, Senator Slossberg, Senator Fasano, Senator Welch, and Committee Members.

SB185 SB384
HB5387 HB5388
HB5754

This afternoon I have provided you a written testimony in which I took a little bit of time to address the Proposed Bill No. 70, AN ACT RESTORING BENEFITS TO VETERANS DISCHARGED UNDER THE "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL."

As you will note in my testimony, I have requested the assistance of the Office of the General Counsel of the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide a -- an opinion on the pending legislation regarding the restoration of eligibility for all available benefits to former members of the Armed

This is an ongoing effort. In addition to that, I believe Senator Leone and I talked earlier last year about the idea of convening a group which Governor Malloy has supported and has said will happen.

So I just want you to know, whatever the outcome of this legislation, that there are efforts that are ongoing to really capitalize on this concept.

And the last -- actually the last bill that I wanted to talk about was S. 5388 which is AN ACT REQUIRING MUNICIPALITIES TO DESIGNATE A VETERANS SERVICE CONTACT. I think that we've discussed this with some of you in the past, and if -- if this could be implemented, it certainly would go a long way. We have over 277,000 veterans in our state. They are not just in one place. They are in every town and city, and many of them are far, far away, and have questions about what is actually going on.

Some of them in some of the outreaches we've done in the past with you, Senator Slossberg, in Milford, and with others up in the Danielson area, it was very heartening to see people who had letters from the V.A., but they were afraid to open them because they didn't want to hear -- see what it said, or -- or afraid they would not understand what it said. So having a contact is a very pragmatic way of reaching across to the neighbors and the friends in the towns and cities. Unfortunately we are not like Massachusetts where they actually have

paid people in every town and city to -- to do this job.

I know that there is a Proposed Bill 5754 which is AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES. For more than 25 years, before the Department of Veterans' Affairs was ever created, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has been documenting the veteran status of the people on their case loads. I know this because I used to work on a grant, and they do ask everybody if you are -- are a veteran.

It wasn't until the late 1990s that they thought about quantifying this, and we find that the population of veterans on the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services case load is over 5000 -- 5000 veterans on DMAS' case load.

In addition to that, in 2004, the you -- the General Assembly enacted authorization to allow the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services in conjunction with the Military Department, my department, and the Children -- Department of Children and Families, to create a health services on a transitional basis for the dependents and any members of the Reserve component of the Armed Forces who had been called to active duty.

Let me just say right there, we -- this is the military support program that many of you know about. It -- it does work in concert with a

Next and at the moment, last on the list, Rusty
-- Rusty Meeks.

RUSTY MEEK: I knew you'd do that.

Good evening, and thank you for bearing with all of us veterans, because they feel good after they tell you something. My name is Rusty Meek. I'm from Manchester, and I got a copy today of a 5388 which is a super good bill. I had heard rumors of it, and I got one off the internet.

The only thing I don't like about your bill is that you say that if they can't get a veteran, they're assigned an employee to do it. Well, as a veteran, I don't like to talk to people that don't know what I'm talking about, and the way this reading is, I have to go get in line, and a little old lady hands me a paper -- or man. I'm sorry; I didn't want to get Senator Slossberg upset. And fill it out. Okay, you got everything. They'll call you.

I work with service officers. I've been in the -- involved in veterans for over ten to twelve years now. I was State Commander for a V.F.W. That is a full-time job. These people don't know what they need. They're not too sure whether they're eligible. And to make this, they have to -- have to be a veteran. Now I got a little bit interested in it because I'm going to a class next month down in Rocky Hill. Just basically -- it's not going to teach me how to do the case. It's going to teach me how

to present -- to get his paperwork so the service officer that's going to work the case doesn't say well, where's this, where's that, which of this, where's that. You get everything ready for him. It's just like a prepping. You get everything ready for the doc, so he comes in and does his job. Well, that's basically what this should be.

I appreciate your taking me time and I -- there's several of these bills that I -- I wouldn't vote for, and there's several I will, and I'm glad I'm not in your guys' shoes. But I appreciate it and -- oh, he took it. I can keep talking. No, but thank you very much.

SENATOR LEONE: Thank you, sir. We appreciate your testimony.

RUSTY MEEKS: No problem.

SENATOR LEONE: And I'd be happy to work with you as we move along.

RUSTY MEEKS: Thank you.

SENATOR LEONE: Any questions?

RUSTY MEEKS: Holy smokes. I got by a Marine, and I'm a submarine sailor.

REP. HENNESSY: Thank you.

SENATOR LEONE: Mr. -- Rusty was our last person. Is there anyone in the audience that didn't have a chance to speak that wants to speak?

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Statement
Commissioner Linda Schwartz

Before
Veteran Affairs Committee
February 19, 2013

contracting opportunities with Federal Agencies. (VA's Veterans "First Buying Authority"; special consideration for contracting opportunities from prime contractors; " VA VETBiz VIP Program" and notices of contracting opportunities. The requirements stipulates that the veteran must have served on Active Military Duty and be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. The second requirement is that veterans own at least 51 percent of the business with the management and daily operations of the business being controlled by veterans. In order for the business to qualify for a Disabled Veteran owned business, the veteran's disability must be permanent and severe and connected with their military service with the same levels of interest, control and operation by the veteran with a caveat that the daily business operations can be conducted by the veteran's spouse or caregiver.

Proposed H.B. No. 5388 AN ACT REQUIRING MUNICIPALITIES TO DESIGNATE A VETERANS SERVICE CONTACT.

The Connecticut Department of Veteran Affairs supports the intent of this legislation to have each municipality to identify a veteran service contact and commits to providing training which would assist them in this program . Connecticut has over 270,000 veterans in every town and city in the state. With today's heavy reliance on the true citizen soldiers of the National Guard and Reserve components of the Department of Defense, having a designated person at the local level as a point of contact for questions and problems regarding veteran issues would be a great help to our Department as well as improve services to each town and city. Massachusetts has had a model in each of their towns and cities which is actually a paid position by the town. These advocates have improved the quality of services to veterans in their state by having a personal interest in finding answers and helping their neighbors access the benefits and services authorized by the State and Federal Government. We see this proposal as an important step in broadening the services to veterans in Connecticut.

Proposed H.B. No. 5754 AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR VETERANS AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES. (VA)

For more than 25 years, before the Department of Veteran Affairs was created by the Legislature, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services has been documenting the veteran status of their clients. As a Public Health Nurse working with psychiatric patients in the community, I was impressed that the question was included in the application for services. However it was not until the late 1990's that someone thought to quantify this population and found that over 5,000 Connecticut Veterans were receiving their Mental Health Service from the State. As the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have continued, the needs of veterans of those hostilities as well as veterans from previous periods of service, who need mental health services, have challenged the VA systems of care on several fronts. Connecticut agencies have been partners in assisting our veterans with their mental health needs.

**VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF CONNECTICUT**

PS



STATE LEGISLATIVE OFFICE

STATEMENT OF

ROBERT A. HUNTER
STATE LEGISLATIVE CHAIRMAN
VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
THE STATE OF CONNECTICUT

WITH RESPECT TO PENDING VETERANS' BENEFITS LEGISLATION
FEBRUARY 19, 2013
HARTFORD, CT

Senate Chairman Leone, House Chairman Hennessey, and members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the following veterans' legislation. The more than 18,500 members of the Department of Connecticut, Veterans of Foreign Wars greatly appreciate the voice you give them at these hearings that are critical to their well-being as veterans and citizens of the great State of Connecticut.

1. Proposed S.B. No. 70 AN ACT RESTORING BENEFITS TO VETERANS DISCHARGED UNDER "DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL". (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation with the conviction that all honorably discharged veterans should be afforded the benefits due them for their honorable service in our nation's armed forces.

2. Proposed S.B. No. 71 AN ACT CONCERNING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS AND SPOUSES OF ACTIVE MILITARY PERSONNEL. (VA)

The VFW supports the proposed legislation as it will serve veterans and their spouses to ease their re-entry into the workforce.

3. Proposed S.B. No. 152 AN ACT CONCERNING A MUNICIPAL PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM FOR ONE HUNDRED PERCENT DISABLED VETERANS. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation. Our one-hundred percent disabled veterans face many challenges throughout the course of their lives most citizens will never experience, with reduced income-earning potential laying in the forefront of the challenges they face as civilians. Relieving these honored citizens of their property tax burden will certainly ease some of the unique stresses they endure as a function of their disability.

4. Proposed S.B. No. 185 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PREFERENCE IN THE AWARD OF STATE CONTRACTS FOR VETERAN-OWNED BUSINESSES. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation. Veterans face unique challenges when re-entering the workforce, let alone starting and operating a business. This act will afford some modicum of parity with the veterans hiring preference for municipal and state employment.

5. Proposed S.B. No. 384 AN ACT CREATING A SET-ASIDE PROGRAM FOR DISABLED VETERAN CONTRACTORS. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation much as it does for proposed S.B. No. 185, with appreciation for the Committee's sensitivity to the additional challenges our disabled veterans face as business owners.

6. Proposed S.B. No. 385 AN ACT EXCLUDING START-UP FARMERS WHO ARE VETERANS FROM THE SALES AND USE TAX. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation.

7. Proposed S.B. No. 647 AN ACT CONCERNING VOTING BY MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY SERVING OVERSEAS. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation which will certainly ease the process of absentee voting for electors who serve overseas on active-duty in the military, their spouses, and/or their dependent (s). We appreciate the steps the Committee is taking to ensure that every Connecticut serviceman/-woman who elects vote may do so expediently, and will have their vote counted.

8. Proposed S.B. No. 649 AN ACT CONCERNING REDUCED FARES ON THE METRO NORTH RAILROAD. (VA), AND Proposed H.B. No. 6167 AN ACT CONCERNING FARES FOR DISABLED VETERANS WHO USE MASS TRANSPORTATION. (VA)

The VFW supports these pieces of proposed legislation.

9. Proposed H.B. No. 5131 AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR SPOUSES OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES WHO ARE DEPLOYED OR TRANSFERRED. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation in principle.

10. Proposed H.B. No. 5188 AN ACT PROVIDING FREE ADMISSION TO AND PARKING AT STATE PARKS FOR CONNECTICUT VETERANS. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation, not only for the recreational benefits it stands to afford our veterans, but for the peaceful setting it stands to provide to those in our ranks who currently suffer from the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress.

11. Proposed H.B. No. 5386 AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING ASSISTANCE FOR VETERANS. (VA), AND Proposed H.B. No. 5755 AN ACT CONCERNING AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR VETERANS AND MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES. (VA)

The VFW supports these pieces of proposed legislation in principle, as they should afford our returning veterans a means of securing a safe, affordable domicile until they fully reintegrate into civilian life.

12. Proposed H.B. No. 5387 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE USE OF MILITARY OCCUPATIONAL SPECIALTY TRAINING AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR STATE LICENSING REQUIREMENTS. (VA)

The VFW heartily supports this proposed legislation which should ultimately lead to legislation that will accelerate the return to the civilian workforce by many of our State's skilled veterans. The current process for licensing these already well-trained men and women is expensive, arduous, and degrading for many who return with a skill-set superior to the minimum requirements for licensing.

13. Proposed H.B. No. 5388 AN ACT REQUIRING MUNICIPALITIES TO DESIGNATE A VETERANS SERVICE CONTACT. (VA)

The VFW supports this proposed legislation in principal. The VFW endorses it with the hope that further steps will be taken to ensure quality time is afforded the veteran(s) in need, and that such a position is not treated as a secondary responsibility of low priority.