
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 284

AN ACT CONCERNING BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN VETERANS WHO HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER OR TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY OR WHO HAVE HAD AN EXPERIENCE OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA.

SUMMARY

This bill extends certain benefits, available to veterans honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions from active service in the armed forces, to veterans who (1) were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or for bad conduct (i.e., veterans with an other than honorable (OTH) discharge), and (2) have a qualifying condition.

Under the bill a “qualifying condition” means a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury made by, or a military sexual trauma experience disclosed to, an individual licensed to provide care at a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facility.

Specifically, the bill extends the following benefits to veterans with an OTH discharge and a qualifying condition:

1. veterans small business price preference for certain state open market orders and contracts (§ 2);
2. special service credit for state employee retirement (war time service is generally counted as state service for retirement purposes)(§ 3);
3. civil service exam bonus points (§ 4);
4. preference for Department of Economic Development-funded low- or moderate-income rental housing (§ 5);
5. state high school diploma exam fee waiver (§ 6);

6. honorary high school diploma, if the veteran withdrew from high school for military service in World War II, the Korean Hostilities, or during the Vietnam era, and consequently did not receive a diploma (§ 7);
7. tuition waivers for the state's public colleges and universities if the veteran served in time of war (§§ 8-10);
8. state-mandated wartime property tax exemptions (minimum \$1,500)(§§ 11-13);
9. farmer tax exemption (§ 14);
10. special veterans license plates, including for vehicles used exclusively for farming (§ 15);
11. veterans status on driver's license and identity card (§ 16);
12. motor vehicle license and registration fee exemption for one licensing period if the veteran was a legal resident of Connecticut at the time of his or her induction and applies within two years following the date of separation (§ 17);
13. exemption from overtime parking fines, with certain exceptions, for disabled veterans who served in a time of war (see BACKGROUND) and their surviving spouse (§ 18);
14. disregard of federal Aid and Attendance Pension benefits (see BACKGROUND) when calculating income for means-tested assistance programs (e.g., Medicaid) (§ 19);
15. admission to the Veterans Residential Services facility or Healthcare Center (§ 20);
16. preference for admission into any hospital, upon the Veterans Affairs commissioner's request, at the state's expense unless other means of payment are available (§ 21);
17. \$1,800 toward funeral expenses or cremation (§ 22);

18. temporary financial assistance for wartime veterans (§ 23); and
19. temporary aid (such as food, clothing, and medical and surgical aid) from the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund (§ 24).

The bill also makes technical, minor, and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2018; the sections on property tax exemption (§§ 11-13) apply to assessment years beginning on or after that date.

VETERANS BENEFITS

The bill extends certain benefits to veterans with an OTH discharge and a qualifying condition under the same terms and conditions under which those benefits are available to veterans honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions from active service. As under existing law, some of these benefits are limited to veterans with war time service only.

Small Business Preference (§ 2)

The law provides certain veteran-owned businesses with up to a 15% price preference for certain Department of Administrative Services open market orders or contracts. The businesses must have gross revenue under \$3 million in the most recently completed fiscal year and have one or more veterans hold at least 51% ownership (CGS § 4a-59(c)).

Civil Service Exam Bonus Points (§ 4)

The law gives bonus points to certain veterans who pass an initial state and municipal civil service examination held to establish a candidate list. If an honorably discharged or released veteran served in a military action and received or is entitled to receive a campaign badge or expeditionary medal and is not otherwise eligible to receive bonus points, he or she qualifies for five bonus points on these exams (CGS § 5-224).

Tuition Waivers (§§ 8-10)

The law requires the state's public colleges and universities to waive

tuition for wartime veterans who are accepted at an approved institution and live in the state at the time of the acceptance.

The waiver applies at community-technical colleges, the Connecticut State University System (CSUS), and the University of Connecticut (UConn)(CGS §§ 10a-77, 10a-99 & 10a-105).

State Mandated Property Tax Exemption (§§ 11-13)

The law requires municipalities to exempt \$1,000 of the property owned by a veteran from taxation (i.e., basic exemption). The law also extends this benefit to certain surviving spouses and minor children (CGS § 12-81(19), (22) & (25)).

Farmer Tax Exemption (§ 14)

By law the Department of Revenue Services may issue a farmer tax exemption permit to a farmer, if the farmer is a veteran who never owned or leased property for commercial agricultural production or who owned or leased property for such purpose for less than two years (CGS § 12-412(D)(63)).

Special License Plate (§ 15)

The law allows any type of motor vehicle owned or leased by a veteran or his or her surviving spouse for one year or longer to qualify for special veterans' license plates. It also requires the DMV commissioner to issue a special registration certificate and a set of number plates to veterans, armed forces members, or their surviving spouses for any motor vehicle they use exclusively for farming, as long as they engage in agricultural production as a trade or profession (CGS § 14-20b).

Veterans Status on Driver's License and Identity Card (§ 16)

By law, the DMV commissioner must include a person's status as a veteran on his or her state driver's license or identity card. To qualify, the person must request that his or her veteran status be included. The Department of Veterans Affairs must verify the requester's status to the DMV commissioner (CGS § 14-36h).

Overtime Parking Fine (§ 18)

The law entitles disabled wartime veterans with certain Veteran Affairs-rated disabilities, upon application, to a free special license that exempts them from overtime parking fines, provided they do not leave their vehicles at the same spot for more than 24 hours. Surviving spouses may keep the plates and identification cards until death or remarriage (CGS § 14-254).

Temporary Assistance (§ 23)

Under the law, wartime veterans who need help because of a disability or other service-related cause may receive temporary financial assistance from the veterans' affairs commissioner. He may also help the spouse, parents, children, or siblings of any veteran who died as a result of such service if they cannot support themselves because of the veteran's death (CGS § 27-125).

Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund (§ 24)

By law, this fund provides temporary aid (such as food, clothing, and medical and surgical aid), general care and relief, or burial expenses to needy wartime veterans or their (1) spouses living with them or who lived with them when they died or (2) dependent children under age 18. The veteran must live in the state when he or she applies for and while getting the assistance (CGS § 27-138 et seq.).

BACKGROUND**War Time Service**

Table 1 summarizes the dates and service conditions that constitute "service in time of war."

Table 1: Post-1940 "Service in Time of War"

Operation	Date	Service Condition
World War II	12/07/41-12/31/47*	Active service during the war
Korean War	06/27/50-01/31/55	Active service during the war
Lebanon Conflict	07/01/58-11/01/58 or 09/29/82-03/30/84	Combat or combat-support role in Lebanon
Vietnam Era	02/28/61-07/01/75	Active service during the war
Grenada invasion	10/25/83-12/15/83	Combat or combat-support role in Grenada required
Operation Earnest Will	07/24/87-08/01/90	Combat or combat-support role

(escort of Kuwaiti tankers flying U.S. flag in Persian Gulf)		required in the operation
Panama invasion	12/20/89-01/31/90	Combat or combat-support role required in the invasion
Persian Gulf War	08/02/1990 until a date prescribed by the President or law	Active-service anywhere during the war (not necessarily in the Persian Gulf or in a combat role)

*Ending dates specified in [CGS § 12-86](#) for property tax exemptions.

Aid and Attendance

The Aid and Attendance monthly pension amount may be added to a veteran's monthly pension amount for veterans who need aid to perform personal everyday living functions, are bedridden, are in a nursing home due to mental or physical incapacity, or have specific limited eyesight.

Related Bill

sSB 288, favorably reported by the Veterans Committee, requires the Department of Social Services (DSS) commissioner, when determining income eligibility for certain state assistance programs, to disregard all non-service-connected pension benefits granted to veterans or their surviving spouses, instead of only the federal Aid and Attendance pension benefits. She must do so to the extent allowed by federal law.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Veterans' Affairs Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 14 Nay 0 (03/14/2018)