



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
MILITARY DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL
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Veterans' Affairs Committee
Public Hearing
February 27, 2020

Testimony in Support of

H.B. 5263, "An Act Establishing a Service Ribbon for Members of the Armed Forces Providing Honor Guard Detail."

H.B. 5265, "An Act Concerning the Organization of the Connecticut State Guard."

S.B. 221, "An Act Concerning A Military Permit for the Sale of Alcoholic Liquor."

S.B. 222, "An Act Establishing a Law Enforcement Support Program Account."

Good morning Committee Co-Chairs, Senator Maroney and Representative Borer, and the distinguished members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am Major General Fran Evon, the Adjutant General of the Connecticut Military Department. I am accompanied today by some of my key staff members: Brigadier General McDonald, the Assistant Adjutant General; Colonel Tomcho, Staff Judge Advocate; and Major Heinonen, my legislative liaison.

Before I begin, I would like to thank Senator Maroney, Representative Borer, and the members of this committee for your continued support of my Department and the Soldiers, Airmen, civilian employees and family members who defend and support our state and nation every day. Last year, over 500 Soldiers and Airmen of the Connecticut National Guard deployed in support of military operations around the globe, while 150 remain mobilized today. Later this year, members of the 143rd Regional Support Group will participate in Defender 20, a European-wide readiness exercise, while members of the 1-102nd Infantry Battalion will participate in a Defender Pacific exercise in the Philippines in preparation for a future deployment to Africa. More than 100 members of the Air National Guard will also deploy to multiple foreign locations around the globe. In addition to our federal mission, members of the armed forces of the state supported hundreds of local missions in support of civic and emergency preparedness events throughout the state. Your Connecticut National Guard and the other elements of the organized militia remain ready to defend the state and nation, to provide emergency response, and to support our state's military community.

With that said, it's an honor to testify before you today. I thank you for your time and consideration of the four Military Department bills on your agenda. These bills serve to clarify current statutory language, ensure the proper and efficient operation of agency programs, and recognize the service of our members. I will briefly address each bill in turn.

H.B. 5263, “An Act Establishing a Service Ribbon for Members of the Armed Forces Providing Honor Guard Detail,” creates a state service ribbon for members of the National Guard or organized militia who perform honor guard details at funerals of qualified veterans. Last year, the agency provided funeral honors for approximately 3,500 veterans across the state. The award will provide a means to appropriately recognize our members who participate in this program and to encourage further participation. In addition to your support, I respectfully request substitute language addressing two minor revisions to the bill. I request that the award be appropriately limited to members of the armed forces of the state for which I have authority to issue awards, as well as language that provides some discretion to establish an appropriate criteria for the award.

H.B. 5265, “An Act Concerning the Organization of the Connecticut State Guard,” has been considered by this committee the past two legislative sessions, each time receiving a joint favorable report. The bill clarifies existing statutory language as it relates to the use of State Active Duty and the Connecticut State Guard. By way of background, the Connecticut State Guard is part of the organized militia and the state armed forces, but is distinct from the National Guard and Governor’s Guard. It is largely comprised of retired National Guard members who possess unique skills or knowledge, such as engineering and logistics, which are of benefit to the Department in accomplishing its varied mission set. Members of the Connecticut State Guard are not state employees. They are paid from state funds at a rate equal to the federal pay rate of their respective rank in the armed forces of the state and are covered by workers’ compensation while ordered to duty. It is a cost-efficient means for the state to accomplish its military missions as there are no overtime, fringe, healthcare, or retirement costs.

In response to a previous audit report, the agency sought a formal opinion of the Attorney General which validated our use of the State Guard in accordance with our agency practice. This bill clarifies the current statutory language in accordance with that opinion.

S.B. 221, “An Act Concerning a Military Permit for the Sale of Alcoholic Liquor,” expands the agency’s statutory military liquor permit to include the sale of all alcoholic liquors at state military facilities. Currently, the agency’s permit only authorizes the sale of beer at state military installations. This proposal serves two purposes. First, it aligns state law with the operations of the federal Army and Air Force Exchange Service on state military installations. That entity manages food, clothing, and beverage stores on military installations around the globe and is governed by federal regulations which permit the sale of beer, wine, and liquor. This bill aligns our state laws with applicable federal regulations. Second, the bill provides flexibility for the future establishment of similar state exchange operations which could better serve the needs of members of the state military establishment relative to the federal model.

S.B. 222, “An Act Establishing a Law Enforcement Support Office Program Account,” is also a resubmission that received a joint favorable report from this committee last year. This bill relates to the Department’s administration of what is commonly referred to as the “1033 program.” This program permits state governments to borrow a wide variety of surplus federal military equipment for use by state and local law enforcement agencies. Pursuant to the federal statute authorizing the program, the Adjutant General has been designated as the administrator for the State of Connecticut on behalf of the Governor.

In order to participate in the program, state and local law enforcement agencies are required to pay a nominal yearly fee based upon the size of their respective department. Annually, this amounts to about \$30,000 dollars which must be utilized to support the program in accordance with federal law. The Department utilizes these funds to administer the program, primarily by paying the salary of a member of the State Guard on State Active Duty to run the program as just discussed. Currently, the Department does not have a dedicated state account for this program. By passing this bill, the Department can ensure proper accounting of these programmatic funds.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important military matters. I respectfully request these bills receive a joint favorable report from this committee and your support in your respective chamber. I look forward to providing future testimony on our one remaining agency bill to be considered by this committee, An Act Concerning the Structure of the Organized Militia and the Maximum Age of Service in the Governor’s Foot Guard. I, or if necessary, members of my staff are prepared to address any questions you may have.