



# Senate

General Assembly

**File No. 249**

January Session, 2021

Substitute Senate Bill No. 914

*Senate, April 1, 2021*

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs reported through SEN. CABRERA of the 17th Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

***AN ACT CONCERNING HMONG LAOTIAN SPECIAL GUERILLA UNITS WHICH SERVED IN THE KINGDOM OF LAOS.***

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

1 Section 1. Section 14-20b of the general statutes is repealed and the  
2 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2021*):

3 (a) The Commissioner of Motor Vehicles, at the request of any veteran  
4 or member of the armed forces or the surviving spouse of such veteran  
5 or member, shall register any motor vehicle owned or leased for a period  
6 of at least one year by such person and shall issue a special certificate of  
7 registration and a set of number plates for each such motor vehicle,  
8 including a special certificate of registration and a set of number plates  
9 for any motor vehicle used exclusively for farming purposes by any  
10 such veteran or member of the armed forces, or the surviving spouse of  
11 such veteran or member, who is engaged in agricultural production as  
12 a trade or business. The plates shall expire and be renewed as provided  
13 in section 14-22. The commissioner shall charge a fee for such plates,  
14 which fee shall cover the entire cost of making such plates and shall be

15 in addition to the fee for registration of such motor vehicle. As used in  
16 this subsection, ["member of the armed forces"] "armed forces" has the  
17 same meaning as provided in section 27-103 and "veteran" means any  
18 person (1) honorably discharged from, or released under honorable  
19 conditions from active service in, the armed forces, or (2) with a  
20 qualifying condition, as defined in section 27-103, who has received a  
21 discharge other than bad conduct or dishonorable from active service in  
22 the armed forces.

23 (b) (1) The Commissioner of Motor Vehicles, at the request of any  
24 person who was a member of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units,  
25 which units served in the United States secret war in the Kingdom of  
26 Laos during the Vietnam War, or the surviving spouse of such person,  
27 and after verification from the Department of Veterans Affairs as  
28 provided under subdivision (2) of this subsection, shall register any  
29 motor vehicle owned or leased for a period of at least one year by such  
30 person and shall issue a special certificate of registration and a set of  
31 number plates for each such motor vehicle, including a special certificate  
32 of registration and a set of number plates for any motor vehicle used  
33 exclusively for farming purposes by any such person, or the surviving  
34 spouse of such person, who is engaged in agricultural production as a  
35 trade or business. The plates shall expire and be renewed as provided  
36 in section 14-22. The commissioner shall charge a fee for such plates,  
37 which fee shall cover the entire cost of making such plates and shall be  
38 in addition to the fee for registration of such motor vehicle.

39 (2) Any person who was a member of the Hmong Laotian special  
40 guerilla units, or the surviving spouse of such person, may submit a  
41 request to the Department of Veterans Affairs to be listed as a veteran,  
42 based on such service, for the purpose of obtaining a special certificate  
43 of registration and a set of number plates under subdivision (1) of this  
44 subsection. Such person, or the surviving spouse of such person, shall  
45 provide to said department (A) an affidavit stating (i) when such person  
46 served, (ii) where such person served, (iii) the unit in which such person  
47 served, and (iv) the capacity in which such person served; (B) any  
48 available corroborating witness affidavits; (C) any available official

49 documentation of service; and (D) any other documents supporting  
50 such person's or such surviving spouse's affidavit. Said department  
51 shall, not later than thirty days after receipt of such request, verify  
52 whether such person was a member of the Hmong Laotian special  
53 guerilla units and, if so, notify the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles of  
54 such request and verification.

55 [(b)] (c) Any such member of the armed forces who is dishonorably  
56 discharged shall return such plates to the commissioner not later than  
57 thirty days after such discharge. The commissioner shall not renew such  
58 plates for any motor vehicle owned or leased by any such member of  
59 the armed forces who is dishonorably discharged.

60 Sec. 2. Section 14-36h of the general statutes is repealed and the  
61 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2021*):

62 (a) Each motor vehicle operator's license issued by the Commissioner  
63 of Motor Vehicles in accordance with section 14-36 and each identity  
64 card issued by said commissioner in accordance with section 1-1h shall  
65 contain the following: (1) The person's full legal name; (2) the person's  
66 date of birth; (3) the person's gender; (4) the person's height and eye  
67 color; (5) the person's assigned operator's license or identity card  
68 number; (6) the person's address of principal residence in this state; (7)  
69 the person's signature; (8) the person's photograph or digital image; and  
70 (9) if applicable, the person's status as a veteran, as provided in  
71 [subsection] subsections (e) and (f) of this section.

72 (b) If any person does not reside in any state, territory or possession  
73 of the United States because such person is on active military duty with  
74 the United States Armed Forces, and such person's home state of record  
75 is Connecticut, as reflected in the records of the Department of Defense,  
76 Department of Homeland Security or any department under which the  
77 United States Coast Guard operates, such person may obtain a  
78 Connecticut operator's license or identity card, provided such person:  
79 (1) Does not have an operator's license or identity card issued by another  
80 state, territory or possession of the United States, or surrenders any such  
81 license or identity card; (2) has a current APO or FPO mailing address;

82 (3) designates such person's home address as 60 State Street,  
83 Wethersfield, CT 06161; and (4) meets all other requirements for  
84 obtaining an operator's license or identity card in this state.

85 (c) The commissioner shall provide that each such license or identity  
86 card document contains physical security features designed to prevent  
87 tampering, counterfeiting or duplication of the document.

88 (d) Each such document shall also contain one or more machine-  
89 readable technology feature or component, including, but not limited to,  
90 a bar code or magnetic strip.

91 (e) Any person who is a veteran may submit a request to the  
92 Department of Veterans Affairs to have his or her status as a veteran  
93 contained on his or her motor vehicle operator's license or identity card.  
94 Said department shall, not later than thirty days after receipt of such  
95 request, verify whether such person is a veteran and, if so, notify the  
96 Commissioner of Motor Vehicles of such request and verification. The  
97 Commissioner of Motor Vehicles shall indicate such person's status as a  
98 veteran on any motor vehicle operator's license or identity card issued  
99 to such person upon original issuance or renewal of a motor vehicle  
100 operator's license or identity card or upon issuance of a duplicate motor  
101 vehicle operator's license or identity card.

102 (f) (1) Any person who was a member of the Hmong Laotian special  
103 guerilla units, which units served in the United States secret war in the  
104 Kingdom of Laos during the Vietnam War, may submit a request to the  
105 Department of Veterans Affairs to be listed as a veteran, based on such  
106 service, on his or her motor vehicle operator's license or identity card.  
107 Said department shall, not later than thirty days after receipt of such  
108 request and the documents required under subdivision (2) of this  
109 subsection, verify whether such person was such a member and, if so,  
110 notify the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles of such request and  
111 verification. The Commissioner of Motor Vehicles shall indicate such  
112 person's status as a veteran on any motor vehicle operator's license or  
113 identity card issued to such person upon original issuance or renewal of  
114 a motor vehicle operator's license or identity card or upon issuance of a

115 duplicate motor vehicle operator's license or identity card.

116 (2) Any such person who was a member of the Hmong Laotian  
117 special guerilla units shall submit to the Department of Veterans Affairs,  
118 in addition to the request under subdivision (1) of this subsection, (A)  
119 an affidavit stating (i) when such person served, (ii) where such person  
120 served, (iii) the unit in which such person served, and (iv) the capacity  
121 in which such person served; (B) any available corroborating witness  
122 affidavits; (C) any available official documentation of service; and (D)  
123 any other documents supporting such person's affidavit.

124 ~~[(f)]~~ (g) As used in this section: (1) "Full legal name" means the most  
125 complete version of the name that appears on a person's certificate of  
126 birth, official passport or other document or documents accepted by the  
127 Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to verify the person's identity, unless  
128 the person presents a marriage license or certificate, a certificate of civil  
129 union, a divorce decree or an order of a court of competent jurisdiction  
130 pertaining to a permanent change of the person's name; and (2)  
131 "veteran" means (A) any person honorably discharged from, or released  
132 under honorable conditions from active service in, the armed forces, as  
133 defined in section 27-103, (B) any former member of the armed forces  
134 who is entitled to retirement pay under 10 USC Chapter 1223, as  
135 amended from time to time, or, but for age, would be so entitled, or (C)  
136 any person with a qualifying condition, as defined in section 27-103,  
137 who has received a discharge other than bad conduct or dishonorable  
138 from active service in the armed forces.

139 Sec. 3. Section 27-118 of the general statutes is repealed and the  
140 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2021*):

141 (a) When any veteran or member, as defined in subsection (e) of this  
142 section, dies, not having sufficient estate to pay the necessary expenses  
143 of the veteran's or member's last sickness and burial, as determined by  
144 the commissioner after consultation with the probate court for the  
145 district in which the veteran or member resided, the state shall pay the  
146 sum of one thousand eight hundred dollars toward such funeral  
147 expenses, and the burial shall be in some cemetery or plot not used

148 exclusively for the burial of the pauper dead, and the same amount shall  
149 be paid if the body is cremated, but no amount shall be paid for the  
150 expenses for burial or cremation unless claim therefor is made within  
151 one year from the date of death, except that in cases of death occurring  
152 abroad, such claim may be made within one year after the remains of  
153 such veteran or member have been interred in this country. No  
154 provision of this section shall prevent the payment of the sum above  
155 named for the burial of any person, otherwise entitled to the same, on  
156 account of such burial being made outside the limits of this state.

157 (b) Upon satisfactory proof by the person who has paid or provided  
158 for the funeral or burial expense to the commissioner of the identity of  
159 the deceased veteran, the time and place of the deceased's death and  
160 burial and the approval thereof by the commissioner, [said] the sum of  
161 one thousand eight hundred dollars shall be paid by the Comptroller to  
162 the person who has paid the funeral or burial expense or, upon  
163 assignment by such person, to the funeral director who has provided  
164 the funeral.

165 (c) (1) Upon satisfactory proof by the person who has paid or  
166 provided for the funeral or burial expense to the commissioner of the  
167 identity of the deceased member, the time and place of the deceased  
168 member's death and burial and the approval thereof by the  
169 commissioner, the sum of one thousand eight hundred dollars shall be  
170 paid by the Comptroller to the person who has paid the funeral or burial  
171 expense, or upon assignment by such person, to the funeral director  
172 who has provided the funeral.

173 (2) The person who has paid or provided for the funeral or burial  
174 expense shall provide to the commissioner (A) an affidavit stating (i)  
175 when the deceased member served, (ii) where the deceased member  
176 served, (iii) the unit in which the deceased member served, and (iv) the  
177 capacity in which the deceased member served; (B) any available  
178 corroborating witness affidavits; (C) any available official  
179 documentation of service; and (D) any other documents supporting the  
180 affidavit.

181 (d) Whenever the Comptroller has lawfully paid any sum toward the  
182 expenses of the burial of any deceased veteran or member and it  
183 afterwards appears that the deceased left any estate, the Comptroller  
184 may present a claim on behalf of the state against the estate of such  
185 deceased veteran or member for the sum so paid, and the claim shall be  
186 a preferred claim against such estate and shall be paid to the Treasurer  
187 of the state. The commissioner, upon the advice of the Attorney General,  
188 may make application for administration upon the estate of any such  
189 deceased veteran or member if no other person authorized by law  
190 makes such application within sixty days after such payment has been  
191 made by the Comptroller.

192 (e) As used in this section, (1) "veteran" means any person [(1)] (A)  
193 honorably discharged from, or released under honorable conditions  
194 from active service in, the armed forces, as defined in section 27-103, or  
195 [(2)] (B) with a qualifying condition, as defined in said section, who has  
196 received a discharge other than bad conduct or dishonorable from active  
197 service in the armed forces, and (2) "member" means any person who  
198 served in the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units, which units served  
199 in the United States secret war in the Kingdom of Laos during the  
200 Vietnam War.

201 Sec. 4. Section 27-122b of the general statutes is repealed and the  
202 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2021*):

203 (a) As used in this section, "veteran" means any person (1) honorably  
204 discharged from, or released under honorable conditions from, active  
205 service in the United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or  
206 Coast Guard or any women's auxiliary branch thereof, organized  
207 pursuant to an Act of Congress; (2) who has completed at least twenty  
208 years of qualifying service, as described in and computed under 10 USC  
209 Chapter 1223, as amended from time to time, in the Connecticut  
210 National Guard; or (3) who was killed in action, or who died as a result  
211 of accident or illness sustained while performing active service, in the  
212 United States Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard or  
213 any women's auxiliary branch thereof, organized pursuant to an Act of

214 Congress, or in the Connecticut National Guard.

215 (b) (1) Any veteran may, by letter or other communication addressed  
216 to the commissioner, or by will, request that upon his or her death his  
217 or her body be buried in a veterans' cemetery established pursuant to  
218 section 27-122a, or (2) the spouse or other next of kin may apply to the  
219 commissioner to have the body of such veteran buried in said veterans'  
220 cemetery, and in either case such request shall be granted.

221 (c) (1) Any member or former member of the armed forces, as defined  
222 in subsection (a) of section 27-103, who is a resident of this state and is  
223 entitled to retirement pay under 10 USC Chapter 1223, as amended from  
224 time to time, or would have been entitled to retirement pay under said  
225 chapter, but for the fact that the person is under sixty years of age, may  
226 by letter or other communication addressed to the commissioner, or by  
227 will, request that his or her body will be buried in said veterans'  
228 cemetery, or (2) the spouse or other next of kin may apply to the  
229 commissioner to have the body of such member or former member  
230 buried in said veterans' cemetery, and, in either case, such request shall  
231 be granted.

232 (d) (1) (A) Any person who served in the Hmong Laotian special  
233 guerilla units, which units served in the United States secret war in the  
234 Kingdom of Laos during the Vietnam War, may, by letter or other  
235 communication addressed to the commissioner, or by will, request that  
236 upon his or her death his or her body be buried in a veterans' cemetery  
237 established pursuant to section 27-122a, or (B) the spouse or other next  
238 of kin may apply to the commissioner to have the body of such person  
239 buried in said veterans' cemetery, and in either case such request shall  
240 be granted.

241 (2) Such person who served in the Hmong Laotian special guerilla  
242 units, or the spouse or next of kin of such person, shall provide to the  
243 commissioner (A) an affidavit stating (i) when the person served, (ii)  
244 where the person served, (iii) the unit in which the person served, and  
245 (iv) the capacity in which the person served; (B) any available  
246 corroborating witness affidavits; (C) any available official



247 documentation of service; and (D) any other documents supporting the  
248 affidavit.

249 [(d)] (e) The spouse of any veteran, or the spouse of any person who  
250 served in the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units described in  
251 subsection (d) of this section, shall, upon similar request or application  
252 made to the commissioner, be buried in said veterans' cemetery  
253 provided only one such request or application shall be granted.

254 [(e)] (f) The commissioner shall designate an area in said veterans'  
255 cemetery for veterans and any persons who served in the Hmong  
256 Laotian special guerilla units described in subsection (d) of this section  
257 who, for religious reasons, require burial in a consecrated area.

258 Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective October 1, 2021*) (a) The Commissioner of  
259 Veterans Affairs, in consultation with the Adjutant General, shall award  
260 a ribbon and medal to each member who is a resident of this state and  
261 who provides to the Department of Veterans Affairs (1) an affidavit  
262 stating (A) when such person served, (B) where such person served, (C)  
263 the unit in which such person served, and (D) the capacity in which such  
264 person served; (2) any available corroborating witness affidavits; (3) any  
265 available official documentation of service; and (4) any other documents  
266 supporting such person's affidavit. As used in this section, "member"  
267 means a person who served in the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units,  
268 which units served in the United States secret war in the Kingdom of  
269 Laos during the Vietnam War.

270 (b) The commissioner, in consultation with the Adjutant General,  
271 shall adopt regulations, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54  
272 of the general statutes, setting forth the process for designing the ribbon  
273 and medal, identifying such members under this section and  
274 establishing procedures for distributing the ribbon and medal to each  
275 such member.

276 (c) The cost of the ribbons and medals shall be paid from the funds  
277 appropriated to the military assistance account within the Military  
278 Department. Within existing budgetary resources, awards under this

279 section may be made posthumously to any deceased member.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>October 1, 2021</i>	14-20b
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2021</i>	14-36h
Sec. 3	<i>October 1, 2021</i>	27-118
Sec. 4	<i>October 1, 2021</i>	27-122b
Sec. 5	<i>October 1, 2021</i>	New section

**Statement of Legislative Commissioners:**

In Section 1(b)(1), "set forth in" was changed to "provided under" for consistency with standard drafting conventions, and in Section 1 (b)(2), "set forth in" was changed to "under" for consistency with standard drafting conventions.

**VA**      *Joint Favorable Subst. -LCO*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

**OFA Fiscal Note**

**State Impact:**

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 22 \$	FY 23 \$
Department of Veterans' Affairs	GF - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
Department of Veterans' Affairs	Institutional General Welfare Fund - Potential Cost	See Below	See Below
Military Dept.	GF - Cost	Up to 20,000	None

Note: GF=General Fund

**Municipal Impact:** None

**Explanation**

The bill expands eligibility for certain veterans benefits to members of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units that served in the Kingdom of Laos during the Vietnam war and surviving spouses. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA), there are currently approximately 60 members of these special guerilla units in Connecticut.

**Sections 1 and 2** expand eligibility for veteran-status license plates, driver's licenses and identity cards. These sections result in no fiscal impact because the requisite fees cover the cost.

**Section 3** results in a potential cost of \$1,800 per veteran for the payment of funeral expenses for certain eligible veterans paid for out of the General Fund. The annual impact will depend on how many individuals are served beginning in FY 22.

**Section 4** results in a potential cost of \$1,750 to \$3,025 per veteran for the payment of burial expenses for the State Veterans' Cemetery paid for out of the Institutional General Welfare Fund. The annual impact will depend on how many individuals are served beginning in FY 22.

**Section 5** requires ribbons and medals to be awarded to members of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units resulting in a cost of up to \$20,000 to the Military Department in FY 22. The cost includes medal and ribbon design and manufacturing.

***The Out Years***

The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future depending on the number of eligible veterans.

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**OLR Bill Analysis****sSB 914*****AN ACT CONCERNING HMONG LAOTIAN SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS WHICH SERVED IN THE KINGDOM OF LAOS.*****SUMMARY**

This bill extends eligibility for certain veterans benefits to members of the Hmong Laotian special guerilla units that served during the Vietnam war in the U.S. secret war in the Kingdom of Laos. Specifically, the bill extends the following benefits to these individuals:

1. veterans license plates, including for vehicles used exclusively for farming (§ 1);
2. veterans status on a driver's license or identity card (§ 2);
3. \$1,800 toward funeral expenses or cremation for certain indigent veterans (§ 3); and
4. veterans ribbon and medal (§ 5).

The bill also allows these Hmong veterans to be buried in a veterans cemetery, which conforms with existing federal law and Department of Veterans Affairs policy (§ 4) (see BACKGROUND).

Under the bill, to claim these benefits, the member (or other applicant, as applicable) must submit a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs and provide the department with (1) an affidavit stating when and where the member served and the unit and capacity in which they served; (2) corroborating witness affidavits, if available; (3) any available official service documentation; and (5) any other supporting documents.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2021

**VETERANS LICENSE PLATES**

The law allows qualifying veterans, armed forces members, or their surviving spouses to request a special registration certificate and veterans license plates for any motor vehicle they own or have leased for at least one year, including any motor vehicle they use exclusively for farming if they engage in agricultural production as a trade or profession (CGS § 14-20b). The bill, additionally, allows Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit members or their surviving spouses to request the special registration and plates by (1) submitting a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs to be listed as a veteran based on such service for purposes of this benefit and (2) providing the required documentation described above.

The department must, within 30 days of receiving the request, verify whether the person was a Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member and, if so, notify the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) commissioner of the request and verification.

As under current law, the DMV commissioner must charge a fee that covers the cost of making the plates, in addition to the motor vehicle registration fee.

**VETERANS STATUS ON DRIVER'S LICENSE OR IDENTITY CARD**

Existing law requires the DMV commissioner to include a person's status as a veteran on his or her driver's license or identity card. Qualifying veterans must submit a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs, which must verify the veteran's status to the DMV commissioner.

The bill allows Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit members to also request this status on their licenses or identity cards by submitting a request to the Department of Veterans Affairs and providing the required documentation. The department must, within 30 days of receiving the request, verify whether the person was a Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member and, if so, notify the DMV commissioner of the request and verification.

As under current law, the DMV commissioner must indicate the member’s veteran status on any license or identification card when originally issued, renewed, or issued as a duplicate.

**RIBBONS AND MEDALS**

The bill requires the veterans affairs commissioner, in consultation with the adjutant general, to (1) award a ribbon and medal to each Hmong Laotian special guerilla unit member who resides in the state and provides the required documentation and (2) adopt regulations for doing so. The regulations must (1) identify the eligible members, (2) establish the process for designing the ribbon and medal, (3) set the procedures for distributing them.

The Military Department’s military assistance account must fund the cost of the ribbons and medals. Under the bill, ribbons and medals may be posthumously awarded within existing budgetary resources.

**BACKGROUND**

***Hmong Veterans Eligibility for Burial in the State Veterans Cemetery***

Eligibility for burial in the State Veterans Cemetery is based on the federal eligibility requirements for burial in national veterans’ cemeteries. Under federal law, Hmong veterans are eligible for burial in Department of Veterans Affairs national cemeteries if they (1) died on or after March 23, 2018; (2) resided in the U.S. at the time of their death; and (3) were naturalized citizens under the Hmong Veterans’ Naturalization Act of 2000 (38 U.S.C. § 2402(a)(10)). Pursuant to this law, existing state Department of Veterans Affairs policy establishes a procedure by which the families of these eligible veterans may apply to the department to determine burial eligibility in the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Veterans’ Affairs Committee

Joint Favorable  
Yea 17 Nay 0 (03/18/2021)