

Veterans' Affairs Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-917

AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS' FEDERAL PENSION BENEFITS FROM

Title: INCOME ELIGIBILITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/23/2021

File No.: 250

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' Affairs Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill requires the Department of Social Services to exclude all federal veterans' pension benefits from income when determining eligibility for public assistance programs. Currently, veterans who receive federal pension benefits administered by the US Department of Veterans Affairs are at risk of losing access to public assistance programs if those pension benefits push them above the income threshold, placing veterans in a precarious position regarding vital services.

***Proposed Substitute Language: In lines 6, 39, 54, 80, 119, 159 and 174, after "benefits" insert "administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs". This additional language clarifies the source of the federal pension benefits being referenced in this bill.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[David Seifel, Legislative & Regulations Analysis, Department of Social Services](#): In submitted testimony, DSS expressed opposition to this proposal, as it would result in increased eligibility, increased caseloads, and an increase in expenditures. While the Department appreciates the intent of this bill, the required funds for such increases are not in place nor are they included in the Governor's proposed budget.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Sen. Kevin Kelly, Senate Republican Leader and Sen. Paul Formica, Deputy Senate Republican Leader Pro Tempore](#). Senators Kelly and Formica offered written testimony and Senator Kelly spoke in support of this bill. In their testimony, they referred to building on the bipartisan progress made two years ago when three bills were passed with the intention of expanding the ability of veterans to reintegrate successfully into civilian life. Passing SB 917 will help vulnerable veterans and their families in getting the vital assistance and care they need.

[Cecelia Sullivan, Care Partner & Family Advocate](#). Ms. Sullivan submitted written testimony in support of the bill. She stated that Connecticut is the only state that does not exempt veterans' federal pension benefits from income eligibility for public assistance programs, and shared that in her view, a pension, which is an earned benefit to provide for their care, should not be considered income.

[Rep. Kathleen McCarty, 38th Dist](#). Representative McCarty offered written testimony in support of this bill, noting that DSS' practice of counting these benefits as income is detrimental to the ability of veterans to access all services available. She closed by stating that "veterans who have given so much of themselves and who have served their country and community selflessly should be entitled to receive all veterans' benefits both federal and statewide without the fear of losing the highest quality of healthcare and personal choice."

[Eileen DeGaetano RN, Retired Geriatric Care Manager](#). Ms. DeGaetano offered written testimony in support of this bill, sharing the story of her father, a veteran whose state benefits were lost due to receiving federal veterans benefits. She further noted the potential savings to the overall system due to reducing elder abuse and neglect related to caregiver burnout and the economic loss to employers due to absenteeism. Finally, she stated that this bill "creates the opportunity to reduce the administrative burden, conflict and confusion that currently exists for Veterans as they seek help between State and Veterans systems."

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed

Reported by: Erica Byrne, Clerk

Date: March 25, 2021