



**Substitute Senate Bill No. 634**

**Public Act No. 23-34**

**AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL VETERANS SERVICES.**

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

Section 1. Section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2023*):

(a) As used in this section, "veteran" has the same meaning as provided in subsection (a) of section 27-103 and "chief executive officer" means the officer described in subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of section 7-193.

(b) Prior to October 1, 2023:

[(a)] (1) Any city or town, either separately or with one or more other cities and towns, may, by ordinance, establish a local veterans' advisory committee which shall have the responsibility of carrying out locally the duties and purposes of this [section] subsection and, within their charter powers and as otherwise provided by law, may make available to such local committees the necessary funds to carry out their duties and responsibilities. The committee may [(1)] (A) act as the coordinating agency in all matters concerning veterans and their dependents, coordinating the activities of public and private facilities concerned with veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to

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peacetime living; [(2)] (B) cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and private agencies in securing services and benefits to which a veteran or his dependents may be entitled; [(3)] (C) use the services and facilities of the veterans organizations so far as possible to carry out the purposes of this [section; and (4)] subsection; and (D) encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans.

[(b) (1)] (2) (A) Any city or town that has not established its own local veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other cities or towns pursuant to [subsection (a) of this section] subdivision (1) of this subsection and does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' service officer shall designate [(A)] (i) a city or town employee, or [(B)] (ii) a volunteer who is a resident of such city or town, and [(i)] (I) is a veteran, [as defined in subsection (a) of section 27-103, or (ii)] or (II) has practical experience handling veterans' issues, to serve as a municipal [veterans'] veterans representative in such city or town. The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs shall annually send to the chief executive officer of any such city or town an electronic notification of such chief executive officer's duty to so designate a city or town employee or volunteer in accordance with this [subsection] subdivision. Such chief executive officer shall, not later than thirty days after receipt of such notification, submit to the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, as described in subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, the name and electronic mail address of the city or town employee or volunteer so designated. [As used in this subdivision, "chief executive officer" means the officer described in section 7-193.]

[(2)] (B) Each municipal [veterans'] veterans representative shall carry out the duties described in [subsection (a) of this section] subdivision (1) of this subsection and shall complete a training course conducted by the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, as described in subdivision (3) of subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, or attend a training session conducted by the manager of said office,

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as described in subparagraph (A) of subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of said section. Each municipal [veterans'] veterans representative designated on or after October 1, 2019, but prior to October 1, 2023, shall complete such training course not later than one year after the date of such designation. Upon completion of such training course, a municipal [veterans'] veterans representative may thereafter receive electronically any new or updated training information from the Office of Advocacy and Assistance and shall not be required to complete any other such training course.

[(3)] (C) Any volunteer designated as a municipal [veterans'] veterans representative by a city or town pursuant to [subdivision (1) of this subsection shall (A)] subparagraph (A) of this subsection shall (i) be available to veterans in person, by telephone or by electronic mail for any minimum number of hours per week that the city or town designating the volunteer may establish, and [(B)] (ii) file a performance report each month with the city or town designating the volunteer that includes, but is not limited to, the names of veterans assisted, services or referrals provided and any other information as determined by the city or town.

(c) On and after October 1, 2023:

(1) (A) Each municipality shall, for the purposes of carrying out the duties and responsibilities of this subsection:

(i) Establish, by ordinance, a municipal veterans advisory committee. Such ordinance shall set forth the number of members of such committee, the method of the members' selection, the members' terms of office and the manner of filling any vacancy. The municipality may make available to such committee the necessary funds to carry out such duties and responsibilities;

(ii) Appoint a director of municipal veterans services, who shall be a

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veteran or have practical experience handling veterans' issues and shall be compensated by such municipality; or

(iii) Appoint one or more municipal veterans representatives, each of whom shall be a veteran or have practical experience handling veterans' issues and shall be a current municipal employee or volunteer.

(B) (i) Two or more municipalities may jointly carry out the duties and responsibilities under this subsection, provided such municipalities shall enter into a memorandum of agreement or understanding for such purpose, which memorandum may include terms concerning sharing of expenses.

(ii) Any municipality that, prior to October 1, 2023, enacted an ordinance establishing a committee, appointed a director or designated a representative pursuant to subsection (b) of this section shall have satisfied the requirement under this subdivision.

(2) (A) Each municipal veterans advisory committee, director of municipal veterans services or municipal veterans representative, as applicable, shall (i) assist veterans and veterans' dependents in accessing services and benefits to which such veterans or dependents may be entitled; (ii) assist in coordinating the activities of public and private facilities concerned with veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to peacetime living; (iii) cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and private providers in connecting veterans and veterans' dependents with services and benefits to which such veterans or dependents may be entitled; (iv) encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans; and (v) coordinate with veterans organizations, as practicable, to carry out the purposes of this subsection.

(B) A member of such committee designated by such committee, or such director or representative, as applicable, shall (i) be available to

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veterans in person, by telephone or by electronic mail for a minimum number of days or hours per week, as determined by the municipality; (ii) file with the municipality each month a report that includes, but is not limited to, the names of veterans and veterans' dependents who were provided assistance, the services or referrals that were provided and any other information required by the municipality; and (iii) not later than one year after such member's, director's or representative's designation or appointment, as applicable, complete a veterans benefits and programs training course conducted pursuant to subdivision (3) of subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, by the Office of Advocacy and Assistance within the Department of Veterans Affairs, except that any such member, director or representative who completed such training course pursuant to subsection (b) of this section prior to October 1, 2023, shall have satisfied the requirement under this clause. After completion of such training course, such member, director or representative may thereafter receive electronically any new or updated training information from said office and shall not be required to complete any other such training course.

(3) The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs shall annually notify each municipality's chief executive officer of the requirement under subdivision (1) of this subsection. Not later than thirty days after receipt of such notification, the chief executive officer shall provide to the Office of Advocacy and Assistance the name and electronic mail address of each member of the municipal veterans advisory committee, the director of municipal veterans services or each municipal veterans representative, as applicable.

Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 27-102l of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2023*):

(b) (1) The commissioner may appoint a manager to administer an Office of Advocacy and Assistance for the aid and benefit of veterans

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and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members. The office shall have a staff of not less than [eight] ten men and women, including [six] eight veterans' service officers, and clerical personnel. The manager and veterans' service officers shall be veterans, as defined in subsection (a) of section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded the armed forces expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces.

(2) (A) The manager shall develop a training module on assisting and serving women veterans with regard to state or federal services or benefits and identifying and advising such veterans of community or nonprofit programs focused on assisting and serving such veterans. The manager shall hold and provide instruction for an annual training session, in accordance with such module, to each veterans' service officer and any [municipal veterans'] member of a municipal veterans advisory committee, director of municipal veterans services or municipal veterans representative, as described in subsection [(b)] (c) of section 27-135, as amended by this act, or representative from an Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service Members center at a public institution of higher education in this state.

(B) At least one of the veterans' service officers shall be a woman having a demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who shall be responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon the next opening of a veterans' service officer position occurring on or after July 1, 2010, at least two of the veterans' service officers shall be individuals having bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish, within existing authorized positions. At least two of the veterans' service officers shall, in addition to carrying out the duties under this section, be responsible for overseeing and supporting municipalities' compliance with the provisions of section 27-135, as amended by this act. Each veterans' service officer shall (i) successfully complete a course in veterans' benefits not later than one year after commencement of employment, (ii) attend the training session described in subparagraph

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(A) of this subdivision, and (iii) be assigned to one of the five congressional districts of the state.

(3) The office staff shall, at least twice annually, conduct a training course for any [municipal veterans'] member of a municipal veterans advisory committee, director of municipal veterans services or municipal veterans representative. The office staff shall include in such training course a summary of state and federal services and benefits, the [duties to be carried out by each municipal veterans' representative, as described in subsection (a) of] requirements under section 27-135, as amended by this act, and any assistance the office staff may provide to any [municipal veterans'] such member, director or representative related to such [duties] requirements.

(4) (A) The office shall develop a written outreach plan identifying (i) strategies for conducting outreach to veterans and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members for purposes of providing assistance in claims for veterans' services or benefits, and (ii) to the extent possible, specific events and other opportunities to provide such assistance that are sponsored by the office or in which the office is participating. The office shall update such written outreach plan as necessary to improve the efficacy of its outreach efforts.

(B) The manager and each veterans' service officer shall electronically track information relating to outreach conducted or attended by the office, including, but not limited to, the title or type of any outreach event conducted or attended and the number of veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members to whom substantive services or referrals were provided.

(C) The office shall utilize the notifications received from the administrator of each nursing home and assisted living facility in the state, pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, to develop an annual schedule for each veterans' service officer to visit

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nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The office shall compile any information collected as a result of such visits and provide quarterly reports on such information to the Board of Trustees for the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(D) The office shall provide quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees for the Department of Veterans Affairs on (i) concerns raised by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members, which concerns shall be summarized by type, frequency and resolution, (ii) petitions filed by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members received by the commissioner under section 27-102l(d)-54 of the regulations of Connecticut state agencies for the four preceding months, and (iii) copies of any such petitions.

Sec. 3. Subsection (c) of section 27-102q of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2023*):

(c) To the extent practicable, the Department of Veterans Affairs shall (1) provide information on its Internet web site regarding legal services organizations that assist veterans in military discharge upgrades, including, but not limited to, links to such organizations' Internet web sites, and (2) provide printed resources concerning methods for obtaining military discharge upgrades, which are created by such legal services organizations, to veterans at the department's offices and facilities and disseminate such resources to [local veterans'] municipal veterans advisory committees, directors of municipal veterans services and municipal veterans representatives, as described in section 27-135, as amended by this act.

Approved June 7, 2023