



General Assembly

January Session, 2023

Committee Bill No. 634

LCO No. 5442



Referred to Committee on VETERANS' AND MILITARY AFFAIRS

Introduced by:
(VA)

AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL VETERANS SERVICES.

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

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 Section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the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

3 (a) As used in this section, "veteran" has the same meaning as
4 provided in subsection (a) of section 27-103 and "chief executive officer"
5 means the officer described in subdivision (2) of subsection (a) of section
6 7-193.

7 (b) Prior to October 1, 2023:

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

16 coordinating the activities of public and private facilities concerned with
17 veterans' reemployment, education, rehabilitation and adjustment to
18 peacetime living; [(2)] (B) cooperate with all national, state and local
19 governmental and private agencies in securing services and benefits to
20 which a veteran or his dependents may be entitled; [(3)] (C) use the
21 services and facilities of the veterans organizations so far as possible to
22 carry out the purposes of this [section; and (4)] subsection; and (D)
23 encourage and coordinate vocational training services for veterans.

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

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

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

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

67 (c) On and after October 1, 2023:

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

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

76 (ii) Appoint a director of municipal veterans services, who shall be a
77 veteran or have practical experience handling veterans' issues and be
78 compensated by such municipality; or

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

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

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

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

104 (B) A member of such committee designated by such committee, or
105 such director or representative, as applicable, shall (i) be available to
106 veterans in person, by telephone or by electronic mail for a minimum
107 number of days or hours per week, as determined by the municipality;
108 (ii) file with the municipality each month a report that includes, but is
109 not limited to, the names of veterans and veterans' dependents who
110 were provided assistance, the services or referrals that were provided

111 and any other information required by the municipality; and (iii) not
112 later than one year after such member's, director's or representative's
113 designation or appointment, as applicable, complete a veterans benefits
114 and programs training course conducted pursuant to subdivision (3) of
115 subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, by the Office of
116 Advocacy and Assistance within the Department of Veterans Affairs,
117 except that any such member, director or representative who completed
118 such training course pursuant to subsection (b) of this section prior to
119 October 1, 2023, shall have satisfied the requirement under
120 subparagraph (B)(iii) of this subparagraph. After completion of such
121 training course, such member, director or representative may thereafter
122 receive electronically any new or updated training information from
123 said office and shall not be required to complete any other such training
124 course.

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

133 Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 27-102l of the general statutes is
134 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
135 *1, 2023*):

136 (b) (1) The commissioner may appoint a manager to administer an
137 Office of Advocacy and Assistance for the aid and benefit of veterans
138 and their spouses, eligible dependents and family members. The office
139 shall have a staff of not less than [eight] ten men and women, including
140 [six] eight veterans' service officers, and clerical personnel. The manager
141 and veterans' service officers shall be veterans, as defined in subsection
142 (a) of section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded the armed forces

143 expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces.

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

156 (B) At least one of the veterans' service officers shall be a woman
157 having a demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who
158 shall be responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon
159 the next opening of a veterans' service officer position occurring on or
160 after July 1, 2010, at least two of the veterans' service officers shall be
161 individuals having bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish, within
162 existing authorized positions. At least two of the veterans' service
163 officers shall, in addition to carrying out the duties in this section, be
164 responsible for overseeing and supporting municipalities' compliance
165 with the provisions of section 27-135, as amended by this act. Each
166 veterans' service officer shall (i) successfully complete a course in
167 veterans' benefits not later than one year after commencement of
168 employment, (ii) attend the training session described in subparagraph
169 (A) of this subdivision, and (iii) be assigned to one of the five
170 congressional districts of the state.

171 (3) The office staff shall, at least twice annually, conduct a training
172 course for any [municipal veterans'] member of a municipal veterans
173 advisory committee, director of municipal veterans services or
174 municipal veterans representative. The office staff shall include in such

175 training course a summary of state and federal services and benefits, the
176 [duties to be carried out by each municipal veterans' representative, as
177 described in subsection (a) of] requirements under section 27-135, as
178 amended by this act, and any assistance the office staff may provide to
179 any [municipal veterans'] such member, director or representative
180 related to such [duties] requirements.

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

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

195 (C) The office shall utilize the notifications received from the
196 administrator of each nursing home and assisted living facility in the
197 state, pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (c) of this section, to
198 develop an annual schedule for each veterans' service officer to visit
199 nursing homes and assisted living facilities. The office shall compile any
200 information collected as a result of such visits and provide quarterly
201 reports on such information to the Board of Trustees for the Department
202 of Veterans Affairs.

203 (D) The office shall provide quarterly reports to the Board of Trustees
204 for the Department of Veterans Affairs on (i) concerns raised by veterans
205 or their spouses, eligible dependents or family members, which
206 concerns shall be summarized by type, frequency and resolution, (ii)

207 petitions filed by veterans or their spouses, eligible dependents or
208 family members received by the commissioner under section 27-102l(d)-
209 54 of the regulations of Connecticut state agencies for the four preceding
210 months, and (iii) copies of any such petitions.

211 Sec. 3. Subsection (c) of section 27-102q of the general statutes is
212 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October*
213 *1, 2023*):

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

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>October 1, 2023</i>	27-135
Sec. 2	<i>October 1, 2023</i>	27-102l(b)
Sec. 3	<i>October 1, 2023</i>	27-102q(c)

Statement of Purpose:

To implement several changes designed to improve the provision of municipal veterans services.

[Proposed deletions are enclosed in brackets. Proposed additions are indicated by underline, except that when the entire text of a bill or resolution or a section of a bill or resolution is new, it is not underlined.]

Co-Sponsors: SEN. KISSEL, 7th Dist.; REP. VAIL, 52nd Dist.

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