

# Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-344

AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN FEDERAL VETERANS' BENEFITS AND  
INCOME ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATIONS FOR CERTAIN PUBLIC

**Title:** ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.

**Vote Date:** 3/14/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/7/2024

**File No.:** 164

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans and Military Affairs Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill aims to expand income disregards for certain means-tested assistance programs administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS). Currently, federal aid and attendance pension benefits for veterans or surviving spouses are disregarded in income calculations. This bill extends this disregard to include any U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)-administered federal pension benefits. The expanded income disregards would apply to various state-administered assistance programs, including Medicaid, Medicare Savings Program, Connecticut Energy Assistance Program, State Administered General Assistance, State Supplement Program, Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders, and the State-Appropriated Fuel Assistance Program.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Matthew Festa, Legislative Analyst – Department of Social Services**

The Department does not support the bill. SB 344 mandates that the Department of Social Services disregard all federal pension benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to veterans or their surviving spouses when the VA has determined Aid and Attendance assistance is necessary. This exemption from consideration for certain state programs, including Medicaid and various assistance programs, would supplement the existing Aid and Attendance pension disregard. There are roughly 30,000 veterans in Connecticut currently receiving VA benefits, though it's unclear how many of them qualify for both a qualifying pension and Aid and Attendance. Aid and Attendance assistance aims to

help cover costs associated with in-home care, assisted living, or nursing home care, which are among the highest-cost services under Medicaid. While the Department acknowledges the bill's intentions, it anticipates a surge in program enrollment and corresponding state spending, which is not budgeted for.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**State Senator Kevin Kelly:** Supports this Bill that seeks to remove barriers to public assistance programs for Connecticut veterans.

**Eileen DeGaetano RN Retired Geriatric Care Manager:** Eileen highlights a problem in Connecticut affecting military veterans, drawing from personal experience with their father, a WWII veteran. As their father aged and required assistance, they utilized the State of Connecticut Home Care Program for Elders to provide necessary care, which proved more cost-effective and beneficial than nursing home care. Despite family support, additional services were needed, leading them to explore VA benefits like Aid and Attendance. However, eligibility for existing state programs was jeopardized upon receiving Aid and Attendance benefits, causing significant stress and uncertainty for the family. She urges the state to address this issue to prevent other veterans and families from facing similar challenges, emphasizing their father's lifelong dedication to service and recognition in the Connecticut Veterans Hall of Fame.

#### **Allison Weir – Veterans Legal Center**

Supports the expansion of benefits for disabled and elderly veterans by including all federal pension benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs. This would potentially cover veterans who receive nonservice connected pensions but are currently excluded from certain state benefits reserved for those needing Aid and Attendance assistance. However, the bill's language limits this expansion to only those veterans for whom the Department of Veterans Affairs has determined Aid and Attendance assistance is necessary. This restriction overlooks the financial struggles of veterans who receive nonservice connected pensions but do not qualify for Aid and Attendance. These veterans often have limited incomes and may still require additional state support. Adjusting the language to remove the requirement for Aid and Attendance assistance could extend eligibility for state benefits to a broader range of indigent, elderly, or disabled veterans receiving nonservice connected pensions.

**Caleb Roseme Assured Quality Homecare:** This bill rightly proposes to disregard certain federal veterans' benefits from income calculations when determining eligibility for essential public assistance programs. Such benefits are often vital lifelines for veterans and their families, providing crucial support for their well-being and livelihoods. I urge you, esteemed members of the Legislature, to lend your full support to SB344

**Nancy Bryda, Emily Schacht, JOHN ANGLACE:** All Support this bill and ask that we do this to help veterans access the services they need and deserve.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

No Sources Provided.

**Reported by: Joseph Hamann**

**Date: March 28, 2024**