



ACTS AFFECTING VETERANS AND THE MILITARY



2015-R-0158

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NOTICE TO READERS

This report provides highlights of new laws (public acts) affecting veterans and the military enacted during the 2015 legislative session. In each summary, we indicate the public act (PA) number.

Not all provisions of the acts are included here. Complete summaries of all 2015 public acts are available on OLR's webpage: <http://cga.ct.gov/olr/olrpassums.asp>.

Readers are encouraged to obtain the full texts of acts that interest them from the Connecticut State Library, House Clerk's Office, or General Assembly's website: <http://www.cga.ct.gov>.

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CERTIFIED JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICER TRAINING CORPS (JROTC) SHORTAGE HIRING

The law allows a local or regional board of education to employ a person certified by the U.S. Armed Forces to be a JROTC instructor or assistant instructor and teach in a JROTC program at a public school without obtaining the regular Connecticut teacher certification ([CGS § 10-230a](#)). Under [PA 15-215](#), if a board of education cannot find a JROTC-certified teacher, it may employ a person enrolled in an armed forces JROTC instructor program to teach the JROTC program at a public school.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2015

CONNECTICUT WOMEN VETERANS' PROGRAM

[PA 15-8](#) requires the Department of Veterans' Affairs to establish, within available resources, a Connecticut women veterans' program. The program must:

1. reach out to women veterans to improve awareness of eligibility for federal and state veterans' benefits and services;
2. assess women veterans' needs for benefits and services;
3. review programs, research projects, and other initiatives designed to address or meet the need of Connecticut women veterans'; and

4. incorporate women veterans' issues in strategic planning on benefits and services.

The program must also annually submit recommendations for improving benefits and services for women veterans to the veterans' affairs commissioner and the Veterans' Affairs Committee beginning January 15, 2016.

Under the new law, a veteran is anyone discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable from active service in the U.S. Armed Forces, or any reserve component, including the National Guard performing duty under Title 32 of federal law.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015

CONTINUING EDUCATION ON VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

[PA 15-242](#) (§§ 60-67) requires certain health care professionals, starting January 1, 2016, to take at least two contact hours of training or education on mental health conditions common to veterans and their relatives during the first renewal period in which continuing education (CE) is required and once every six years thereafter. This training or education includes (1) determining whether a patient is a veteran or a relative; (2) screening for conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, risk of suicide, depression, and grief; and (3) suicide prevention training.

The new law requires such CE for the following professions:

1. advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs),
2. alcohol and drug counselors,
3. chiropractors,
4. marital and family therapists,
5. professional counselors,
6. psychologists, and
7. social workers.

It also allows physicians to take such training.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015

CRIMINAL JUSTICE POLICY ADVISORY COMMISSION

[PA 15-44](#) adds the veterans' affairs commissioner or his designee to the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission. It gives the member authority to deliberate and vote on veterans issues within the criminal justice system, including the reentry needs of incarcerated veterans.

By law, the commission analyzes the criminal justice system; determines its long-term needs; recommends policy priorities; and advises and assists the governor and General Assembly in developing plans, policies, programs, and legislation to improve the system ([CGS § 18-87k](#)).

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS (VA)

[PA 15-197](#) gives the VA Board of Trustees more oversight over the department. It requires (1) the VA commissioner to give certain information to the board so it can monitor the VA's performance and (2) the board to review and comment on the VA budget and major policies relating to the Veterans' Home.

The new law increases the board's voting membership by adding two Veterans' Home residents as voting members and making the VA commissioner a nonvoting ex-officio member instead of a voting member, thus increasing the number of voting members from 17 to 18.

Among other things, the act requires the commissioner to submit additional reports to the legislature on the feasibility of implementing the Program Review and Investigations Committee's recommendations on the Veterans' Home operations.

EFFECTIVE DATE: most provisions effective July 1, 2015

GOVERNOR'S HORSE GUARDS

[PA 15-244](#) (§ 218) transfers \$90,000 each year in FY 16 and FY 17 from the Community Investment Account to the Military Department for Personal Services. For each fiscal year, it directs \$45,000 to fund the First Company Governor's Horse Guard unit at the Avon facility and \$45,000 for the

Second Company Governor's Horse Guard unit at the Newtown facility.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2015

JUDICIAL BRANCH DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING FOR DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS

[PA 15-246](#) requires the Judicial Branch, beginning January 1, 2016, to collect data on the number of armed forces members, veterans, and nonveterans who apply for and are accepted or denied entry into the state diversionary programs.

The Judicial Branch, beginning January 15, 2017, must annually submit a report detailing the data compiled for the previous calendar year to the Veterans' Affairs and Judiciary committees.

For data collection purposes, a veteran is anyone discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable from active service in the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or Air Force), or any reserve component, including the National Guard performing duty under Title 32 of federal law.

EFFECTIVE DATE: January 1, 2016

LIFE INSURANCE WAR-RISK EXCLUSION CLAUSE PROHIBITION

[PA 15-70](#) generally prohibits issuing or delivering to anyone known to be an armed forces member that eliminate or

otherwise reduce an insurer's liability if the insured's death results from war a life insurance or annuity policy, contract, or certain related documents.

The new law applies to an in-state active member of the U.S. Armed Forces, or any reserve component, including the National Guard performing duty under Title 32 of federal law.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015

MILITARY RETIREMENT INCOME EXEMPTION

[PA 15-244](#) (§ 65) fully exempts federally taxable military retirement pay from the state income tax. Current law exempts 50% of this retirement pay.

The exemption applies to Federal retirement pay for retired members of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Army and Air National Guard.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage and applicable to tax years beginning on or after January 1, 2015.

QUALIFICATIONS AND DUTIES OF THE OFFICE OF MILITARY AFFAIRS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

[PA 15-65](#) (1) requires a person to achieve the rank of field grade or senior officer, instead of the lower rank of officer to be the Office of Military Affairs executive director, and (2) modifies the duties to remove obsolete functions and reflect current agency practice.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015

SUBSIDIZED TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM (STEP) FOR UNEMPLOYED ARMED FORCES MEMBERS

[PA 15-127](#) makes several changes in the STEP programs. By law, these programs (including one for unemployed armed forces members) provide grants to qualifying businesses and manufacturers to help offset the cost of training and compensating eligible new employees and unemployed veterans during their first 180 days on the job.

Current law allowed the Labor Department, in FY 13, to use up to 4% of funds allocated for the STEP programs to cover their marketing and operations costs. The new law, among other things, (1) allows the commissioner to use the funds at her discretion and (2) reduces, from 4% to 1%, the amount of the funds set aside for such purposes.

The new law also allows the commissioner to use certain money from a fund used to pay outside consultants to cover transportation costs for eligible veterans for whom businesses are receiving a STEP grant.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2015

VETERANS AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

[PA 15-117](#) creates a tax incentive to encourage certain veterans to start a farming business. It does this by relaxing the conditions eligible veterans

must meet to qualify for a sales and use tax exemption permit for property used exclusively in commercial agricultural production.

The program applies to a veteran who is honorably discharged or released from active service in the U.S. Armed Forces or their reserve components, including the Connecticut National Guard performing duty under Title 32 of federal law. An "eligible veteran" is one who has never owned or leased property for commercial agricultural production or did so for less than two years.

The new law also allows the Agriculture Department to collaborate with the Labor and Veterans' Affairs departments and UConn Cooperative Extension Service to (1) encourage and help veterans start or expand an agricultural business and (2) provide education and training opportunities to veterans in farming and agricultural operations.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

VETERANS' DAY OBSERVANCE

[PA 15-149](#) requires the veterans' affairs commissioner to annually hold suitable exercises in the Veterans' Home on November 11 (Veterans' Day) to recognize the residents for their military service.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

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