

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

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SB208

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2016**

**VOL. 59
PART 5
1368 – 1703**

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SENATE

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April 28, 2016

226, S.B. No. 179, go. Calendar Page 12, Calendar
372, S.B. No. 346, go. Calendar Page 17, Calendar
405, S.B. No. 365, go. Calendar Page 36, Calendar
Page 226 -- I'm sorry, Calendar Page 36, Calendar
226, S.B. No. 179, go. Calendar Page 9, Calendar
359, S.B. No. 455, go. And if the Clerk can call in
that order, please.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On Page 2, Calendar 134, substitute for S.B. No.
208, AN ACT CONCERNING TECHNICAL AND CONFORMING
CHANGES AND UPDATES TO THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
AFFAIRS STATUTES. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer; good evening.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Good evening, Madam President. Madam President, I
move for acceptance of the Joint Committee's
favorable report and passage of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

The motion is on acceptance and passage. Will you
remark?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Yes. Thank you, Madam President.

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Madam President, the bill before us is a request that the Department of Veterans Affairs -- and it does; just as the title of the bill suggests, it makes technical and conforming changes to the statutes governing the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Madam President, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO No. 4288. I would ask that the Clerk please call the amendment, and that I be granted leave of the Chamber to summarize.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

LCO No. 4288, Senate "A", offered by Senator Flexer.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Madam President, I move adoption.

THE CHAIR:

The motion is on adoption. Will you remark, ma'am?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Yes. Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, this amendment just makes a couple of changes in Line 170 of the bill, again at the request of the

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department. I urge the Chamber to adopt this amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark on the amendment? Will you remark on the amendment?

If not, I will try your minds. All those in favor, please say Aye.

SENATORS:

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

Opposed? The amendment is adopted. Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, again, this is purely a technical bill at the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and I hope that all members of the Chamber can support it.

THE CHAIR:

Will you remark further on the bill? Will you remark further on the bill? If not, Senator Flexer.

Oops, I'm so sorry. Okay. At this hour sir, you don't need the jacket. Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Madam President, may we stand at ease for a moment, please?

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THE CHAIR:

The Senate will stand at ease.

The Senate will come back to order. Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Madam President, thank you very much, and I apologize to the Chamber. I'm good. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Senator -- go ahead -- Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Madam President, if there's no objection, I move that we place S.B. No. 208 on our Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

No, no. There will be -- Mr. Clerk, will you please call for a roll call vote? The machine will be open.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate.
Immediate roll call in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gomes, Senator Bartolomeo, Senator Linares, all of you that are in the Chamber, please vote. No problem.

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All members have voted. All members have voted.
The machine will be closed. Mr. Clerk --

THE CLERK:

S.B. No. --

THE CHAIR:

-- please call the tally.

THE CLERK:

S.B. No. 208

Total Number of Voting	36
Those Voting Yea	36
Those Voting Nay	0
Absent and Not Voting	0

THE CHAIR:

The bill passes. (Gavel) Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On Page 2, Calendar 132, substitute for S.B. No. 205, AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**VETERANS'
AFFAIRS**

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**2016
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February 23, 2016

kbk/cw

VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

1:00 P.M.

TOM SAADI: Good afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, ranking Member and esteemed Members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I am Tom Saadi, the Chief of Staff and General Counsel of the State Department of Veterans' Affairs. Unfortunately Commissioner Connelly could not be here as he is in Washington, D.C. today. I thank you for your work on behalf of Connecticut veterans, and for the opportunity to speak to you today.

SB197
SB208
HB5353

While the Commissioner supports several of the Committee's raised bills, my testimony will generally focus on those bills related to the Department's operations.

I'd first like to discuss the concepts raised in Bills 201 and 206, the expansion of the Connecticut wartime service medals to service members on active duty in Connecticut, and to veterans who died between November 1918 and December 1999.

It is a laudable and deserved expansion. I would echo the comments of General Russo that prior to final action, the Committee allow the Military Department and the Department of Veterans' Affairs to discuss this and to work with the Committee to assess the impact and the ability to be able to do this, should the bill pass with the -- within current resources, which we all know are limited.

With regard to raised Bill --

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Indiscernible - away from microphone)

TOM SAADI: With regard to raised Bill 205; this

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VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

1:00 P.M.

respectfully inform the Committee that the Department believes we already have the authority to do that, pursuant to the Commissioner's general authority over the Department in administrative matters.

We also found that PS -- that NSAs, unlike public service announcements, would actually cost us at a minimum, \$50,000 a year to have those NSAs on the radio, and more for television and other electronic formats. However, the Department will continue to review this issue, and should resources allow, we will develop such NSAs, as well -- (PAUSE IN RECORDING).

Sorry, did I hit that? -- a long-term chronic-care disease hospital, residential rehabilitative services, and advocacy and assistance for veterans and eligible dependents.

The Department generally supports raised Bill 197, the designation of veterans as a protected class, and respectfully ask though that you consider whether or not the proposed protection should be expanded to include members of the armed forces, including National Guard and Reserve components, who may not necessarily be considered veterans under Connecticut General Statute 27-103.

But also in that consideration to look at those protections at the federal and state level, and to see where the gaps actually exist, and to tailor the language to address those because protections at the state level may be more readily available to our service members and veterans.

The Department thanks the Committee for raising Bill 208, which contains technical changes to increase

clarity and consistency, and update the many outdated terms and definitions related to the Department in the General Statutes.

We further thank the Committee for raising Bill 5353, which eliminates the two-year residency requirement for admission to the Department's residential services program. Such a requirement is no longer needed, or appropriate, as denying housing to an otherwise eligible veteran, solely for not having lived in Connecticut for two continuous years, is inconsistent with best practices of assisting our veterans in need of housing.

The bill also addresses some inconsistent language between Statutory Sections 1, which applies that residents must have served in time of war, and another section which does not contain that requirement.

I thank you for your time and while I am happy to respond to any questions, I would first like to introduce two members of our staff who are also here to assist with responses.

First, is Emily Hein; she's the Department's Director of Communications. She is a member of the Connecticut Army National Guard and has been so for nine years as an OIF Iraq War veteran. She also chaired the DVA's women's veterans' committee that produced the report.

Also with us is Ms. Jeannie Gardiner of the Department's veterans' affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance. She's a VSO in the 2nd District. She is a member of Army Reserve from 1998 to 2004, and is an OIF veteran.



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
287 West Street
Rocky Hill, Connecticut 06067

(14)
SB197 SB208
HB5353

Department of Veterans' Affairs Testimony to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs February 23, 2016

Good afternoon, Senator Mae Flexer, Representative Jack Hennessey, ranking members, and esteemed members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee:

I am Thomas Saadi, Chief of Staff and General Counsel for the State Department of Veterans' Affairs and I am here on behalf of Commissioner Sean Connolly who is currently in Washington D.C. I thank you for your work on behalf of Connecticut Veterans and for the opportunity to address you today. While the Commissioner supports of several of the committee's raised bills my testimony will generally focus on bills related to the Department's operations.

I would first like to discuss the concepts raised in bills 201 and 206. The expansion of Connecticut Wartime Service Medals to service members on active duty and to Veterans who died between November 12, 1918 and December 31, 1999, is laudable and well deserved, however it will require an increase of Departmental resources to process applications and award potentially thousands of additional medals. Since 2005 the Department has proudly awarded more than 34,000 of such medals without additional staff or funding and increasing the number of medals awarded could impact limited resources and increase the time frame for application processing and awarding of medals.

Raised Bill 205 incorporates many of the recommendations of the Department's Connecticut Women Veterans' Program report. That said, elements of this legislation would require diversion of Department resources that currently provide direct services Connecticut Veterans, female and male. The Department would welcome the opportunity to work with the committee to find ways to accomplish many of these laudable goals without requiring reallocation or additional resources. Additionally, several of the items outlined in the bill are already underway at the Department. I will briefly discuss these items below.

The Department is exploring the development of a women veterans services training module as set forth in section 1 of the bill. The Department has been reviewing and updating our VSO training, which covers a broad range of federal, state and local benefits, services and assistance for all Veterans - female and male. We have been communicating directly with the Federal VA CT Healthcare System Women Veterans Program Manager in this process. Also, the Department has scheduled two training sessions in 2016 for all municipal veterans' service contact persons. We are open to expanding that training to include representatives of the state public institutions of higher education as contemplated in the bill.

Additionally, the Department is in the process of redesigning its website with a focus on our core services in a user-friendly platform to include specific women Veterans information as contemplated in section 4 of the bill.

The Department supports the creation of Non-commercial Sustaining Announcements (NSAs) encouraging Veterans to participate in the Department's Veterans registry set forth in Section 3 of the bill. We'd like to respectfully inform the committee that such authority already exists and the Department has investigated the issue, finding that NSAs, unlike Public Service Announcements, would cost a minimum of fifty thousand dollars to run annually on radio. The Department will continue to review this issue and should resources allow, will develop such NSAs as well as other NSAs and PSAs to inform Veterans of the core services provided by the Department which include: long-term chronic disease healthcare, residential and rehabilitative services and advocacy and assistance for veterans and eligible dependents.

The Department supports raised Bill 197, the designation of Veterans as a protected class and respectfully asks you to consider expanding the proposed protection to include current members of the Armed Forces, including National Guard and Reserve components. At the Department we have learned of instances of discrimination against these personnel and while I served as an Assistant Attorney General and as a Judge Advocate in the Army Reserve I investigated many such instances of discrimination against National Guard and Reserve personnel. While certain federal protections apply to these personnel broader protection at the state level would provide greater and more accessible protections for our military personnel.

The Department thanks the committee for raising bill 208 which contains technical changes to increase clarity and consistency and update many outdated terms and definitions related to the Department.

The Department thanks the committee for raising bill 5353 which eliminates the two-year residency requirement for admission to the Department's residential services program. Such requirement is no longer needed or appropriate. Denying housing to an otherwise eligible Veteran solely for not having lived in CT for two continuous years is inconsistent with best practices of assisting Veterans in need of housing. The bill also addresses inconsistent language in which one statutory section implies that service "in time of war" is a precondition for eligibility while a subsequent and more specific section contains no such precondition.

I thank you for your time and am happy to respond to questions.