

Legislative History for Connecticut Act

PA 16-192

SB205

Senate	1601-1612, 1699-1701	15
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Transcripts from the Joint Standing Committee Public Hearing(s) and/or Senate and House of Representatives Proceedings

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**CONNECTICUT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE**

**PROCEEDINGS
2016**

**VOL. 59
PART 5
1368 - 1703**

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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.

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SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you, 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. Madam President, this bill builds on the work that this legislature did last year, asking the Department of Veterans Affairs to focus on the unique needs of women veterans. The department convened a group to look at these issues and they came up with a report, and the bill before us is the result of that report.

Madam President, the Clerk is in possession of an amendment, LCO No. 4530. 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. 4530, Senate "A", offered by Senator Flexer.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

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SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you, Madam President. I move adoption.

THE CHAIR:

The motion is on adoption. Will you remark?

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Yes, Madam President. Madam President, this amendment makes a few changes to the bill regarding the publishing of information of matters of concern, and benefits for women veterans, and where it can be published. And it also changes the initial requirement in the bill that there be a staff person at the Department of Veterans Affairs specifically dedicated to women veterans.

The amendment, if adopted, would eliminate the fiscal impacts of this bill. I urge the Chamber to support this amendment.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Will you remark further on Senate "A"? Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, to the proponent of the bill.

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, sir.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

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Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

This is on the amendment, sir.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

I'm sorry?

THE CHAIR:

This is on the amendment, sir.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

This is on the amendment, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Thank you.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

On the amendment, there was the amendment to do away with the fiscal note on the bill. What was the fiscal note -- what caused the fiscal note to occur?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

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Through you, Madam President. Madam President, the initial fiscal note was caused by the requirement in the bill that there be a dedicated staff person at the department to work on these issues. We've worked closely with the department on this program since this legislature adopted legislation concerning this last year, and they have assured us that they can continue to move forward with these issues, without having to employ an additional person, and that's why we have this amendment that removes that requirement from this bill.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, so it's my understanding that the underlying bill requires that for women veterans, that certain issues -- opportunities for women veterans are expanded, programs for women veterans are expanded.

And it's my understanding that the amendment reduces the employee who originally in the bill was presumed to carry on these duties to achieve the goal. And is the amendment now a change of mind that we no longer need that person?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

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Through you, Madam President. The amendment would eliminate the requirement of a new women veterans' coordinator. But again, I do believe the department is dedicated to working on these issues. They worked with us closely on the legislation that we passed last year. They came up with a report that led to the proposal that's before us this evening, and I know that many members of their existing staff are dedicated in advancing those goals, and I'm confident they'll be able to do that, if we do adopt this amendment, and eliminate the initial requirement that there be a women veterans' coordinator.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. With respect to the amendment, I have no further questions. Thank you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you so much. Will you remark further? Will you remark further?

If not, I'll try your minds on Senate "A". All those in favor please say Aye.

SENATORS:

Aye.

THE CHAIR:

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Opposed? Senate "A" passes. Will you remark on the bill? Will you remark further on the bill? Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, to the proponent of the bill. The bill --

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, sir.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. The bill seems to have this new language, which is added to say that they will -- that the purpose of the bill is to develop a module for assisting and serving women veterans in benefits and identifying programs for them. Can you describe what programs these might be?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, some of the programs that may be adopted through this new coordination would include existing benefits that are available to veterans, making sure there's outreach being done to women veterans.

Specifically, one of the things we learned in working on this legislation, and working on the

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legislation last year, is that oftentimes female veterans don't avail themselves of the programs and the benefits that are available to them. There are sometimes issues with women feeling as though they are not full veterans, if you will, and so the reason that we're working on this this evening is to make sure that -- that there's more advocacy and outreach to women veterans to let them know that the various programs and benefits exist.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, with respect to non-women veterans, are those programs, modules, whatever they're called, are they in place for non-women currently?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you, Madam President, yes. There are some programs that are available right now to all veterans, and then there are some programs that may need to be developed that will meet the unique needs of women veterans.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

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SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. I guess then my question is, if we're doing it for all veterans, what is the need to single out the women veteran if -- veteran or veterans; why is there all of a sudden the change to say that we need to make sort of a gender call, and specifically say for women veterans we have this, if we're already doing it for all veterans?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you, Madam President. Again, there is -- it's been presented to us, and to the department, that there are sometimes issues with women veterans not recognizing that all of the benefits that are available to all veterans, are available to them.

There are veterans -- female veterans, particularly of a former generation, that for some reason or another did not identify themselves as strongly as veterans, as male veterans have. And so, the outreach efforts are really critical to reaching out to those populations.

In addition, there are some issues that female veterans are more likely than male veterans to have suffered, particularly in the area of military sexual trauma. And so developing programs around issues like that will be more particular to female

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veterans than male veterans, although male veterans can certainly be victims of MST as well.

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you for that answer, Senator Flexer. With respect to -- this also requires for advertisement; radio, television commercials for public awareness, is that true, too?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you, Madam President. The legislation before us would allow the department to do that sort of outreach, but it certainly isn't a requirement.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. Once again, thank you, Senator Flexer. Senator Flexer, do you believe that up until the time of passage of this bill there's

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been a -- an emptiness or not fulfillment of that obligation to women veterans absent this bill?

Through you, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Flexer.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

Through you, Madam President. I guess to answer that question, you know, when we passed this legislation with broad unanimous support in both chambers last year, I think there was a recognition of the unique needs of women veterans, and that difficulty that I've described throughout this conversation of women accessing benefits for whatever reason.

I did attend one of the meetings of the working group that the department put together to look at these issues, the women who were a part of that were women veterans from all walks of life, and they -- you know, they spoke strongly to the difficulty that some women have in identifying themselves as veterans; whether it demonstrates itself in not accessing benefits or not being as likely to join veteran service organizations, and different issues like that.

So, I think this bill is an important step, and this program is an important step to getting women veterans more access to these programs, and making sure that women veterans are fully availing themselves of veterans, and that we're researching what needs may be unique to female veterans, like military sexual trauma, and making sure those

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programs are in place so that we can honor our veterans the way they certainly should be honored.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Fasano.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH):

Thank you, Madam President. I have no further questions.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you. Will you remark further on the bill? Will you remark further on the bill? Senator Flexer. Okay.

SENATOR FLEXER (29TH):

I make a motion that we place this item on our Consent Calendar, Madam President.

THE CHAIR:

Seeing no objections, so ordered, ma'am. Mr. Clerk.

THE CLERK:

On Page 17, Calendar 434, substitute for S.B. No. 401, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT BIOSCIENCE INNOVATION FUND AND INVESTMENTS BY CONNECTICUT INNOVATIONS, INCORPORATED. There are amendments.

THE CHAIR:

Good evening, Senator Hartley.

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SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you, Madam President. And on Calendar Page 9, Calendar 359, S.B. 455; I'd like to place that item on our Consent Calendar.

THE CHAIR:

So ordered. Seeing no objection, so ordered, sir.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH):

Thank you, Madam President. And if the Clerk can now call the items on the Consent Calendar, followed by a vote of our Consent Calendar tonight.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, when you can, please call the Consent Calendar.

THE CLERK:

On Page 1, Calendar 83, S.B. No. 183; Page 2, Calendar 132, S.B. No. 205; on Page 4, Calendar 237, S.B. No. 298; Page 5, Calendar 285, S.B. No. 317; on Page 8, Calendar 346, S.B. No. 338; Page 9, Calendar 372, S.B. No. 346; also on Page 9, Calendar 359, S.B. No. 455; on Page 10, Calendar 374, H.B. No. 5327; Page 12, Calendar 386, H.B. No. 5379; on Page 14, Calendar 405, S.B. No. 365; Page 17, Calendar 434, S.B. No. 401; Page 17, Calendar 438, S.B. No. 267; Page 32, Calendar 69, S.B. No. 186; and on Page 33, Calendar 85, S.B. No. 187; also on Page 33, Calendar 129, S.B. No. 202; Page 34, Calendar 138, S.B. No. 137; also on Page 34, Calendar 139, S.B. No. 140; on Page 35, Calendar

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186, S.B. No. 262; Page 36, Calendar 203, S.B. No. 240; Page 36, Calendar 222, S.B. No. 301; Page 36, Calendar 226, S.B. No. 179; on Page 37, Calendar 249, S.B. No. 122; Page 38, Calendar 257, S.B. No. 139; on Page 40, Calendar 333, S.B. No. 289; and on Page 41, Calendar 349, S.B. No. 300.

THE CHAIR:

Mr. Clerk, will you call for a roll call vote on Consent Calendar 1. The machine is open.

THE CLERK:

Immediate roll call has been ordered in the Senate on the Consent Calendar for today. Immediate roll call in the Senate.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Gomes; Consent Calendar. Senator Hartley; thank you.

All members have voted. All members have voted. The machine will be closed. Mr. Clerk, will you call the tally, please?

THE CLERK:

On today's Consent Calendar

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

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THE CHAIR:

The Consent Calendar passes. (Gavel)

Are there any points of personal privilege? Senator Leone. Senator Leone?

SENATOR LEONE (27TH):

Yes. Yes, Madam President, just for a purpose of an announcement?

THE CHAIR:

Please proceed, sir.

SENATOR LEONE (27TH):

For just -- for the General Law Committee, we'll have a meeting for a referral 15 minutes prior to the start of the first session tomorrow. Thank you.

THE CHAIR:

Thank you; so noted. Senator Winfield.

SENATOR WINFIELD (10TH):

Yes, thank you, Madam President. The Housing Committee will be meeting at 10:30 outside the House Chamber.

THE CHAIR:

Senator Coleman.

SENATOR COLEMAN (2ND):

**JOINT
STANDING
COMMITTEE
HEARINGS**

**VETERANS'
AFFAIRS**

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February 23, 2016

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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

incorporates many of the recommendations of the Department, Connecticut Women's Veterans' project report. That said elements of the legislation would require the allocation of department resources that are currently providing direct services to Connecticut veterans; female and male.

The Department would welcome the opportunity to work further with the Committee to develop ways to accomplish many, if not all of the recommendations, without requiring reallocation or additional resources.

Additionally, several of the items outlined in the bill are already under way at the Department. I will briefly discuss those items. First, the Department is currently exploring the development of a women's veterans' service training module as set forth in Section 1 of the bill. The Department has been engaged in the viewing and updating of VSO training, which occurs over a broad range of federal, state and local benefits for veterans, both male and female. We have been communicating directly with the Federal VA Connecticut Health Care System Women's Veterans' Program manager throughout this process.

Additionally, the Department is in the process of redesigning its web site, with the focus on core services and a user-friendly platform, to include specific information related to women's veterans, as contemplated in Section 4 of the bill.

The Department does support the creation of non-commercial sustaining announcements, NSAs, encouraging veterans to participate in the veterans' registry set forth in Section 3 of the bill. We

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VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

February 23, 2016

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

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Testimony of
 Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
 Submitted to the
 Veteran's Affairs Committee
 February 23, 2016

Re: S.B. 21, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY DEPARTMENT'S
 NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS

S.B. 205, AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS

Senators Flexer and Henri and Representatives Hennessey and Yaccarino, and distinguished members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in support of S.B. 21, An Act Concerning the Military Department's Nondiscrimination Laws and S.B. 205, An Act Concerning Women Veterans.

The number of women in the military today continues to rise and women's roles in our national defense are constantly evolving. Today, women constitute approximately 20 percent of new recruits, 14.5 percent of the 1.4 million active duty component and 18 percent of the 850,000 reserve component. While the number of male veterans is expected to decline by 2020, the number of female veterans is expected to grow dramatically, to 11 percent of the overall veteran population.¹

S.B. 21, AN ACT CONCERNING THE MILITARY DEPARTMENT'S
 NONDISCRIMINATION LAWS

In December of last year, Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced that the United States military had opened all combat roles to women. Many female service members have been serving in combat zones but have been officially denied membership in infantry positions. S.B. 21, An Act Concerning the Military Department's Nondiscrimination Laws, is one way Connecticut can apply the goals of the Defense Secretary's announcement by ensuring that Connecticut service members who serve in the National Guard are protected from discrimination.

S.B. 21 inserts the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) anti-discrimination guidelines into the Military Department's statutes, making it illegal for the Connecticut

¹ Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home

National Guard to discriminate based on religion, national origin, color, race, sex, gender identity or expression, and sexual orientation. This is a long overdue change and one the PCSW heartily endorses.

S.B. 205, AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS

Women represent the fastest growing group of veterans who are enrolling in VA healthcare and yet a third of VA medical centers do not have a gynecologist on staff. In a 2015 report commissioned by Disabled American Veterans (DAV), serious gaps were identified in every aspect of the programs that serve women, including healthcare, employment, finance, housing, social issues and the eradication of sexual assault.² Women have differing needs from their male veteran counterparts and programs must adapt and change to meet those needs.

During the 2015 legislative session, Connecticut lawmakers passed Public Act 15-8, which charged the Department of Veteran's Affairs with establishing a women's veteran's program. Among other things, the program was asked to submit recommendations for improving benefits and services available to women veterans. S.B. 205, An Act Concerning Women Veterans seeks to enact many of the recommendations made in that report including a woman's veterans' coordinator to provide centralized administrative support, a quick reference guide for female veterans, training, public service announcements, and a website dedicated to matters of concern for women veterans.

The PCSW appreciates this committee and the legislature's support of women veterans. Women who have served our country deserve consistent access to a full range of gender-sensitive benefits and services. We are hopeful that this legislation sets us on a path to do just that.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

² <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf>



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.

Heather L. Sandler, MSW
75 Heywood Drive
Glastonbury, CT 06033
860-729-3569

Good Afternoon, Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, Senator Gomes, Representative Ilcastro and members of the Veteran Affairs Committee. I am Heather Sandler, a Social Worker, Mother, wife, professor, and former staffer to U.S Senator Richard Blumenthal. Before I was any of those however, I was a United States Navy Veteran.

I am sorry that I cannot be there today but wanted to provide my written testimony in support of SB205, An Act Concerning Women Veterans. After ten years four deployments and a terrible life changing experience on active duty I was honorably discharged in 2005. I came to Connecticut to marry my college sweetheart without any knowledge of what benefits I was entitled to except my education benefits. A chance encounter here at the LOB in 2010 while I was a UCONN Graduate Student Intern changed my life. It opened a door to meet other women Veterans and to develop relationships with many of you and some of the other women sitting in the audience and testifying today.

SB205 is vital and important to Women Veterans as a population of Veterans who continue to be undervalued and underserved. Even as you meet today approximately 20% of women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan have been diagnosed with PTSD, and 27% of women Vietnam Veterans suffered from PTSD sometime during their lives. (National Center for PTSD). In Connecticut there are over 16,000 Women Veterans having served in all eras, including World War II through Iraq and Afghanistan.

As our military continues to drawdown the numbers of veterans coming back to CT will continue to grow. The National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics predicts that the Women Veteran population will continue to increase to over 20% of the total Veteran population by the year 2030, while the overall projected Veteran population will continue to decrease.

These numbers and the strong women who have testified before you today are the reason why we must put into action a Women Veteran's Outreach program. I know I am not alone in having struggled to find resources and benefits. I know that I should have accessed VA care much sooner than I did. No Veteran, especially a Female Veteran should have to struggle with her demons and not have someplace to turn. I know the arguments will be why are women veterans "special" why are they different than any other veteran. We are different because we ARE that 1% who volunteered to enter into military service. There has not been any time in our nation's history that women were called into service. We have earned the right to access benefits just like our male counterparts.

I implore you to work with the Women Veteran's Task Force, the Commissioner and Women Veterans across the State of Connecticut to pass SB205. I am committed to ensuring another Sister in Arms knows that she is not alone. I was assisted by a Woman Veteran by a stroke of luck. It should not be a stroke of luck that brings Women Veterans to their benefits, rights, care, and support be it state or federal.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.



www.bravodeltaconsulting.com • 860-997-4982 • dawn@bravodeltaconsulting.com

**Connecticut Veterans' Affairs Committee
February 23, 2016 Public Hearing**

Testimony in favor of bills SB 205, HB 5353

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Hennessy, Senator Gomes, Representative Nicastro, and members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am Dawn A. McDaniel, President of Bravo Delta Consulting, LLC a certified Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business. Bravo Delta Consulting, LLC specializes in women veterans' advocacy and bridging the military/civilian cultural divide. We work with companies, organizations, and communities to build successful and effective veterans' initiatives and programs.

Less than one percent (1%) actively serves in the US Military, and there is roughly seven percent (7%) veterans in the workforce. This leaves the majority of the Nation with little to no direct knowledge or understanding of the military and its culture. Unfortunately, many civilians obtain their information from news and movies, which often misrepresent the military culture, values, and competencies.

Understanding the military culture lays the groundwork for building effective veterans' initiatives and programs. When programs are developed by civilians who have little to no knowledge of the unique challenges, attributes, and competencies military servicemembers possess, they are set up for failure from the onset.

Women veterans' are a population that is grossly underserved and undervalued. The general assumption is that men serve in our Armed Forces, and programs and initiatives are developed through this lens. It is time for the women veteran lens to be applied to these initiatives. In order for initiatives to be successful, they must provide services and benefits to all veterans, not simply a select few deemed worthy by those with limited exposure and experience with the military and its culture.

Below are the bills I support with justification for why they are important in supporting all veterans.

S.B. No. 205 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS. (VA).

I fully support this bill! Women veterans proudly served. They were not required to serve, in fact, they weren't even asked to serve. Their service is as valuable as a man's,



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and must be recognized so that more women are able to stand proud of their service, instead of having it constantly minimized.

My personal story.

As woman veteran who transitioned to Connecticut from active duty over 13 years ago, I know firsthand the struggle to identify resources and get the support I have earned. Upon moving to Connecticut, I contacted the State Veteran Affairs Department to seek transition support for employment, programs, and benefits I was eligible for in the state. I didn't even receive a response. After further investigation, on my own, I learned that because I exited the Army in 2000, not 2001, my benefits were limited. Meanwhile, my husband, who left the Army in 2002 and transitioned to Connecticut from active duty at the same time, was easily able to identify benefits and programs available to him.

There was no way for me to identify as a veteran, be connected with other women veterans in the state, or learn of benefits and programs that would benefit me. Even though I contacted the Department of Veterans Affairs directly, registered for veteran plates, and sought help through the Department of Labor, they did not capture me as a veteran in the state. As a result, when women veteran's programs were piloted, I was not even notified or made aware of these programs.

While the state has made great progress in supporting veterans over the past 13 years, women veterans remain largely invisible. *Our service is often undermined and ignored.* Veterans' services are rarely viewed through the women veteran lens or tailored to our unique challenges and needs, leaving the transition support inadequate at best.

Finding women veterans

As a result of minimizing women's service, many women do not identify with being a veteran or find it too difficult to continue to fight for the services they need and have earned. Connecticut must do a better job of recognizing women veterans and making it safe to self identify. Further, when they do self identify, they need the opportunity to join a veteran registry so that they are aware of programs and benefits available to them.

Unemployment

Unemployment among women veterans 44 years old and younger remains above average, while the Nation celebrates that veteran employment is at an all time low. In fact, in July 2015 the unemployment rate for women veterans aged 35-44 was nearly double that of their male counterparts. This doesn't even begin to address the issue of



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underemployment. *This is unacceptable.* Why is there less attention on this statistic? This lack of awareness and acknowledgement to the problems facing women veteran transition is the exact reason we need to pass this bill.

Women veterans have earned their benefits, just as men veterans have. Their service is equal to that of their male counterparts, yet their needs have been unrecognized leading to a significant lack of support. Our women veterans deserve more from the state of Connecticut!

Best practices in other states

During my work with the Council of State Governments, I learned that best practices prioritizing women veterans' initiatives include a women veteran coordinator. Without this dedicated, paid resource, women veterans have no advocate, and unfortunately get lost in the process. Some of the states that have a women veteran coordinator include Nevada, Florida, Kentucky, Indiana, Missouri, Texas, Oregon, Ohio, Georgia, and Washington. In these states, they have programs in place to identify, educate, and celebrate women veterans.

Training

As previously mentioned, women veterans' service is often overlooked, undermined and misunderstood, resulting in a lack of awareness and understanding of the challenges and needs of women veterans. The training module and annual refresher training will serve as a foundation for those assisting and serving women veterans, and allow them to provide more effective service.

H.B. No. 5353 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMISSION TO THE STATE VETERANS' HOME. (VA)

I support reforms to eligibility for admission to the State Veteran's Home. Many veterans have served in a time of peace. Servicemembers have no input as to when our Nation will go to war. Instead, they bravely train and prepare for war; standing ready to answer the call and defend our Nation every day, regardless of what is happening in the world during their service. Their service and personal sacrifice is no less than those who served during a time of war and should not be minimized by the decisions of politicians and a time of peace.

I also support the lowering of continuous residence from two years to thirty days. Often veterans are geographically separated from family or their durable power of attorney for