

Massachusetts House Passes Comprehensive Veterans Legislation

The following is a press release from Representative Christopher Markey:

Representative Christopher Markey joined the Massachusetts House of Representatives in passing H4661 – “An Act honoring, empowering, and recognizing our servicemembers and veterans (HERO Act).” The legislation supports veterans by increasing their eligible tax credits and state benefits while modernizing the everyday services they rely on.

“The HERO Act is a transformative package of reforms that will make sure our veterans and their families have access to the benefits, resources and support they deserve,” said Governor Maura T. Healey. “As we approach Memorial Day, we are grateful to the House for advancing this essential bill today and look forward to our continued partnership with the Legislature to strengthen veteran services in Massachusetts.”

“In the Commonwealth, we have a duty to ensure that our veterans receive the best services and support. I proudly voted for this legislation because it takes substantive steps towards achieving that worthy goal,” said Representative Christopher Markey (D-Dartmouth). “This bipartisan legislation makes comprehensive improvements across the veteran support system in Massachusetts. We will continue to fine-tune our veteran services to create a community worthy of our veteran population.”

The HERO Act includes the following changes to veteran benefits:

- Medical assistance, dental and vision benefits: requires the Secretary of the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS)

to provide a medical assistance benefit, behavioral health assistance benefit, and dental benefit beyond other benefits available to veterans, including medical and dental visits, behavioral health assessments, procedures, prescriptions, and costs.

- Benefits for dependents of veterans: updates the definition of “dependent” to make it gender neutral and include children over the age of 18 that meet the criteria for emancipation. It also expands the pool of coverage by extending benefits to dependents who are mentally or physically unable to support themselves after reaching the age of 23. This section aligns the residential eligibility requirements of the dependent of a veteran with residential eligibility requirements of the veteran, granting benefits to the dependent of a veteran that has resided in Massachusetts for one day prior to applying for benefits.

- Veteran benefits income eligibility: clarifies that an increase to an otherwise eligible veteran’s income due to a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) made to social security, supplemental security

Page 2 Office of State Representative Christopher Markey

income, or social security disability insurance would not render the recipient ineligible for benefits in the year the adjustment was issued.

- Annuity for blind, paraplegic or veterans with disabilities: starting July 1, 2024, increases from \$2,000 to \$2,250 the annuity for blind, paraplegic, or veterans with disabilities. Starting July 1, 2025, increases from \$2,250 to \$2,500 the annuity for blind, paraplegic, or veterans with disabilities.

- Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemeteries: codifies the authority of the recently created E0VS to operate, maintain and expand the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemeteries in Agawam and Winchendon, and to add new locations, subject to the availability of funds, to meet the needs of veterans and their dependents.

- Reinstatement of benefits by Veterans Equality Review Board: requires the Veterans Equality Review Board (VERB) to ensure

that veterans discharged due to sex, race, color, religious creed, national origin, age, genetic information, ancestry, marital status, disability, or any U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs category eligible for upgrade, receive state-based benefits.

- Workplace benefits and services poster: the bill requires the Secretary of EOVs, with the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, to create and distribute a notice including information regarding the services and resources available to veterans to be posted in the workplace and provided on the employees first day by employers in Massachusetts with more than 50 full-time employees.

The HERO Act includes the following tax initiatives:

- Veterans' property tax abatement and exemptions: creates two local options, a) municipalities may annually increase local property tax abatements for veterans in an amount equal to the increase in cost of living determined by the Consumer Price Index for the year and b) municipalities may offer an additional exemption to veterans that qualify for local property tax exemptions up to 100 percent of the amount of the exemption for which veteran qualifies.

- Employer tax credit for hiring veterans: increases from \$2,000 to \$2,500 the amount of a tax credit for each qualified veteran hired by an employer and for subsequent years of continued employment of each veteran. This applies for taxable year 2024.

- Motor Vehicle Sales Tax exemption: adds veterans with disabilities with a Purple Heart recipient plate to those allowed a sales tax exemption for the purchase of a motor vehicle for personal use.

The HERO Act passed the Massachusetts House of Representatives unanimously. The bill now goes to the Senate for consideration.

Media Contact: Jeff Illsley, Legislative Aide
(jeff.illsley@mahouse.gov)