



PA 18-47—sSB 284

Veterans' Affairs Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING BENEFITS FOR CERTAIN VETERANS WHO HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER OR TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY OR WHO HAVE HAD AN EXPERIENCE OF MILITARY SEXUAL TRAUMA

SUMMARY: This act extends certain specified benefits to veterans who (1) were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or for bad conduct (i.e., veterans with an other than honorable (OTH) discharge) and (2) have a qualifying condition, which means a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury made by, or a military sexual trauma experience disclosed to, an individual licensed to provide care at a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs facility.

Under prior law, these benefits were only available to veterans who were honorably discharged or released under honorable conditions from active service in the armed forces (U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Air Force and any reserve component of these branches, including the Connecticut National Guard performing duty under Title 32 of the U.S. Code (e.g., certain Homeland Security missions)). As under existing law, some of these benefits are limited to veterans with war time service only.

Specifically, the act extends the following benefits to veterans with an OTH discharge and a qualifying condition (see BACKGROUND for more detailed benefit descriptions):

1. veterans small business price preference for certain state open market orders and contracts (§ 2);
2. special service credit for state employee retirement (war time service is generally counted as state service for retirement purposes)(§ 3);
3. inclusion of time served in war in the length of state employment for veterans who were reinstated as state employees after returning from military service (§ 3);
4. state civil service exam bonus points (§ 4);
5. preference for Department of Economic Development-funded low- or moderate-income rental housing (§ 5);
6. state high school diploma exam fee waiver (§ 6);
7. honorary high school diploma, if the veteran withdrew from high school for military service in World War II, the Korean Hostilities, or during the Vietnam era, and consequently did not receive a diploma (§ 7);
8. tuition waivers for the state's public colleges and universities if the veteran served in time of war (§§ 8-10);
9. certain veteran property tax exemptions (minimum \$1,500)(§§ 11-13);

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10. farmer tax exemption (§ 14);
11. special veterans license plates, including for vehicles used exclusively for farming (§ 15);
12. veterans status on driver's license and identity card (§ 16);
13. motor vehicle license and registration fee exemption for one licensing period if the veteran was a legal resident of Connecticut at the time of his or her induction and applies within two years following the date of separation (§ 17);
14. exemption from overtime parking fines, with certain exceptions, for disabled wartime veterans and their surviving spouse (§ 18);
15. disregard of federal Aid and Attendance Pension benefits (i.e., a monthly amount that is added to certain veterans' pension) when calculating income for means-tested assistance programs (e.g., Medicaid) (§ 19);
16. admission to the Veterans Residential Services facility or Healthcare Center (§ 20);
17. preference for admission into any hospital, upon the Veterans Affairs commissioner's request, at the state's expense unless other means of payment are available (§ 21);
18. \$1,800 toward funeral expenses or cremation for indigent veterans (§ 22);
19. temporary financial assistance for wartime veterans (§ 23); and
20. temporary aid (such as food, clothing, and medical and surgical aid) from the Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund (§ 24).

The act also makes technical, minor, and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2018; the sections on property tax exemption (§§ 11-13) apply to assessment years beginning on or after that date.

BACKGROUND

Small Business Preference (§ 2)

The law provides certain veteran-owned businesses with up to a 15% price preference for certain Department of Administrative Services open market orders or contracts. The businesses must have gross revenue under \$3 million in the most recently completed fiscal year and have one or more veterans hold at least 51% ownership (CGS § 4a-59(c)).

Civil Service Exam Bonus Points (§ 4)

The law gives bonus points to certain veterans who pass an initial state civil service examination held to establish a candidate list. If a veteran served in a military action and received or is entitled to receive a campaign badge or expeditionary medal and is not otherwise eligible to receive bonus points, he or she qualifies for five bonus points on these exams (CGS § 5-224).

Tuition Waivers (§§ 8-10)

The law requires the state's public colleges and universities to waive tuition for wartime veterans who are accepted at an approved institution and live in the state at the time of the acceptance. The waiver applies at community-technical

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colleges, the Connecticut State University System, and UConn (CGS §§ 10a-77, 10a-99 & 10a-105).

Property Tax Exemptions (§§ 11-13)

Wartime Veterans. The state-mandated veterans' property tax exemption (i.e., \$1,000 of the property owned by a veteran) is available to state resident veterans who served at least 90 days in a time of war. (CGS § 12-81(19)).

Surviving Spouse and Minor Child. A \$1,000 state-mandated property tax exemption is available to an unmarried surviving spouse and minor children of a veteran who qualified for the wartime state-mandated exemption described above, as long as the spouse remains unmarried and a Connecticut resident (CGS § 12-81(22)).

Surviving Parent. A \$1,000 state-mandated property tax exemption is available to a sole surviving parent of a veteran who qualified for the wartime state-mandated exemption described above, as long as the parent remains unmarried and a Connecticut resident (CGS § 12-81(25)).

State-Mandated Income-Based Exemption. Municipalities must give veterans and surviving spouses or parents who receive the state-mandated property tax exemption an additional income-based exemption. For a veteran or surviving spouse or parent whose income falls below the limit set by the uniform income requirements, the additional exemption is equal to \$2,000 (twice the \$1,000 state-mandated exemption)(CGS § 12-81g(a)). For those whose income exceeds the limit, the additional exemption is \$500 (50% of the \$1,000 state-mandated exemption)(CGS § 12-81g(d)).

Optional Municipal Exemptions. A municipality, with its legislative body's approval, may (1) provide an additional exemption to wartime veterans or their surviving spouses when they are entitled to the state-mandated exemptions and (2) establish a higher income limit for this exemption than the limit in effect for the state-mandated income-based exemption. PA 18-102 allows municipalities to increase the maximum income limits for eligibility, as long as the income limits are at least the uniform income amount. The local-option exemption may be a dollar amount (up to \$20,000) or percentage (10%) reduction in the property's assessed value (CGS § 12-81f).

Farmer Tax Exemption (§ 14)

By law, the Department of Revenue Services may issue a farmer tax exemption permit to a farmer, if the farmer is a veteran who never owned or leased property for commercial agricultural production or who owned or leased property for such purpose for less than two years (CGS § 12-412(63)(D)).

Special License Plate (§ 15)

The law allows any type of motor vehicle owned or leased by a veteran or his or her surviving spouse for at least one year to qualify for special veterans' license plates. It also requires the DMV commissioner to issue a special registration certificate and a set of number plates to veterans, armed forces members, or their surviving spouses for any motor vehicle they use exclusively for farming, as long

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as they engage in agricultural production as a trade or profession (CGS § 14-20b).

Overtime Parking Fine (§ 18)

The law entitles disabled wartime veterans with certain Veteran Affairs-related disabilities, upon application, to a free special license that exempts them from overtime parking fines, provided they do not leave their vehicles at the same spot for more than 24 hours. This applies to veterans who (1) have lost the use of one or both legs or arms, or had them, or parts of them, amputated, (2) are blind, or (3) have traumatic brain injury, and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs has certified any such disability as service-connected. Surviving spouses may keep the plates and identification cards until death or remarriage (CGS § 14-254).

Temporary Assistance (§ 23)

Under the law, wartime veterans who need help because of a disability or other service-related cause may receive temporary financial assistance from the veterans' affairs commissioner. He may also help the spouse, parents, children, or siblings of any veteran who died as a result of such service if they cannot support themselves because of the veteran's death (CGS § 27-125).

Soldiers, Sailors and Marines Fund (§ 24)

By law, this fund provides temporary aid (such as food, clothing, and medical and surgical aid), general care and relief, or burial expenses to needy wartime veterans or their (1) spouses living with them or who lived with them when they died or (2) dependent children under age 18. The veteran must live in the state when he or she applies for and while getting the assistance (CGS § 27-138 et seq.).