

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 3508**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

***Steven S. Howitt***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act relative to veteran health, opportunity, notification, observance and respect.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	DATE ADDED:
<i>Steven S. Howitt</i>	<i>4th Bristol</i>	<i>1/18/2023</i>
<i>Joseph D. McKenna</i>	<i>18th Worcester</i>	<i>1/31/2023</i>

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 3508**

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By Representative Howitt of Seekonk, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3508) of Steven S. Howitt and Joseph D. McKenna relative to veteran health, opportunity, notification, observance and respect. Veterans and Federal Affairs.

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[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION  
SEE HOUSE, NO. 4873 OF 2021-2022.]

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Third General Court  
(2023-2024)**  
\_\_\_\_\_

An Act relative to veteran health, opportunity, notification, observance and respect.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. Chapter 111 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2020 Official Edition,  
2 is hereby amended by adding the following section:-

3           Section 243. (a) The commissioner of public health, in consultation with the  
4 commissioner of veterans’ services and the adjutant general of the Massachusetts national guard,  
5 shall develop written educational materials that provide information about health effects  
6 associated with chemicals identified at open burn pits in overseas military deployments,  
7 including, but not limited to: (i) symptoms associated with exposure to open burn pits during  
8 overseas military deployment; (ii) information regarding the U.S. Department of Veterans  
9 Affairs’ Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry and resources that can assist with the  
10 registration process; (iii) information regarding the eligibility requirements for participation in

11 the Registry, including deployment locations and dates; (iv) information on participation in the  
12 Registry and resources that can provide assistance with the registration process; and (v) contact  
13 information for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit  
14 Registry. The commissioner, in consultation with appropriate professional licensing boards and  
15 professional membership associations, shall ensure the information is made available to all  
16 appropriate licensed health care providers in Massachusetts.

17 (b) The commissioner, in consultation with the commissioner of veterans'  
18 services and the adjutant general of the Massachusetts national guard shall: (i) monitor the most  
19 current published epidemiological studies and recommendations arising as a requirement of 38  
20 U.S.C. 527, as well as developments in the study and treatment of conditions associated with  
21 exposure to toxic airborne chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits; and (ii) keep record of  
22 self-identifying service members and veterans who have been exposed to burn pits, that shall  
23 include the name, address, electronic address, phone number, location and period of service, and  
24 other information as deemed necessary. Such information shall be used only for the purposes of  
25 communicating information about exposure to toxic airborne chemicals and fumes caused by  
26 open burn pits to service members and veterans. The database, materials or other information  
27 shall be confidential and privileged, shall not be subject to chapter 66, or clause Twenty-sixth of  
28 section 7 of chapter 4 and shall not be subject to subpoena, discovery or introduction into  
29 evidence in any private civil action.

30 (c) On or before January 1, 2024, the commissioner, in coordination with the  
31 commissioner of veterans' services and the adjutant general of the Massachusetts national guard  
32 shall prepare an informational pamphlet regarding the health effects of exposure to open burn  
33 pits and how to participate in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and

34 Open Burn Pit Registry and resources that can provide assistance with the registration process  
35 for distribution by the commissioner of veterans services and the adjutant general of the  
36 Massachusetts national guard. The informational pamphlet shall be distributed to all  
37 organizations the commissioner of veterans' services and adjutant general of the Massachusetts  
38 national guard see fit, including but not limited to, veteran service offices throughout the  
39 commonwealth and veteran organizations. Veteran service officers shall receive training to assist  
40 with the implementation of this section.

41 (d) The informational pamphlet required in subsection (c) of section 243 of  
42 chapter 111 of the General Laws shall be made available on the department of public health's  
43 website once this bill is adopted into law.

44 SECTION 2. Chapter 115 of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the  
45 following section:-

46 Section 16. (a) The commissioner of veterans' services, the commissioner of  
47 public health and the adjutant general of the Massachusetts national guard, shall collaborate to  
48 contact all members of the Massachusetts national guard and all known veterans and members of  
49 the U.S. Armed Forces residing in Massachusetts who may be eligible to participate in the U.S.  
50 Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry. The  
51 commissioner of veterans' services, the commissioner of public health and the adjutant general  
52 of the Massachusetts national guard shall develop and execute a plan that ensures contact with  
53 members of the Massachusetts national guard and veterans or members of the U.S. Armed  
54 Forces residing in Massachusetts who may have served in the following: (i) Operation Enduring  
55 Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn; (ii) Djibouti, Africa, on or after

56 September 11, 2001; (iii) Afghanistan, on or after September 11, 2001; (iv) Operation Desert  
57 Shield or Operation Desert Storm; or (v) in the Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after  
58 August 2, 1990.

59 (b) Veterans or service members contacted shall be encouraged to join the  
60 Registry and shall be provided with: (i) contact information for the U.S. Department of Veterans  
61 Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry; and (ii) a copy of the pamphlet created  
62 by the commissioner of public health pursuant to subsection (c) of section 243 of chapter 111.

63 (c) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, on or before September 1,  
64 2023, the adjutant general of the national guard and the commissioner of veterans' services shall  
65 encourage the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to enhance and simplify the registration  
66 process for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry by providing for: (i) identification  
67 verification for DS Logon Level 2 access to be made available at U.S. Department of Veterans  
68 Affairs' community-based outpatient clinics throughout Massachusetts; (ii) the creation of a  
69 paper registration option; and (iii) the creation of a process for deceased veterans' family  
70 members to participate in the Registry on behalf of said veteran.

71 (d) On or before October 1, 2023, the adjutant general of the national guard shall  
72 request that the periodic health assessment for members of the Massachusetts national guard to  
73 determine whether the guard member was deployed to a location that would make him or her  
74 eligible to participate in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open  
75 Burn Pit Registry, and whether the guard member was exposed to open burn pits during his or  
76 her deployment to said location.

77 (e) On or before October 1, 2023, the adjutant general shall request that any  
78 member of the Massachusetts national guard who during his or her periodic health assessment is  
79 identified as having been potentially exposed to open burn pits during a deployment is  
80 automatically registered to participate in the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne  
81 Hazard and Open Burn Pit Registry.

82 SECTION 3. Chapter 33 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby amended by  
83 inserting the following section:-

84 Section 137A. (a)The Massachusetts National Guard family education program  
85 (NGFEP) shall be an extension of the National Guard Education Assistance Program as outlined  
86 in Section 137, to include dependents of Massachusetts Guard members when requirements are  
87 met as specified.

88 (b) National Guard members may split their state sponsored 130 credit tuition and fee  
89 waiver between dependents. For the purpose of this section, dependents are defined as immediate  
90 family members enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).

91 (c) The program shall be administered by the Military Division which will maintain a  
92 record of tuition and fee credit total, not to exceed 130 total credits per service member. The  
93 Military Division may issue a certificate of exemption from the matriculation fee and tuition to  
94 specified dependents of the Massachusetts Army or Air National Guard members enrolled at any  
95 state institution, in a program the cost of which is borne by the commonwealth, and who are  
96 qualified as provided in this section. Identified dependents must use their specified credit  
97 allotment within ten years of service member separation or by the age of 26, whichever date is  
98 later.

99 (d) To receive benefits from the program, the member must extend their current  
100 service obligation or reenlist for NGFEP benefits after completing their initial 6-year military  
101 service obligation to the Massachusetts National Guard. In order to be eligible, the  
102 Massachusetts National Guard member must: (i) be eligible to serve an additional 6-year  
103 enlistment from the date of extension or reenlistment; (ii) be in good standing and a satisfactory  
104 participant in the Massachusetts National Guard; and (iii) have not previously used their 130  
105 semester credit state tuition waiver.

106 (e) No combination of member and/or dependents shall receive benefits in excess of 130  
107 semester credit hours total.

108 (f) Enrollment of a dependent in a course at any such institution shall be dependent on the  
109 availability of seats. For the purposes of this section, "availability of seats" is defined as  
110 vacancies that exist in a course after the enrollment of all tuition-paying students, and all students  
111 who are enrolled under any scholarship or tuition waiver provisions.

112 SECTION 4. Chapter 6 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby amended by  
113 inserting after section 15MMMMMM the following 4 sections:-

114 Section 15NNNNNNN. The governor shall annually set apart June 14, the  
115 anniversary of the founding of the United States Army, in recognition of the distinguished  
116 patriotic services rendered by that organization, and by the citizens of the commonwealth who so  
117 gallantly served, and issue a proclamation recommending that the day be observed by the people  
118 in the display of the flag and in appropriate public exercises, commemorative of the services and  
119 sacrifices of the citizens of the commonwealth who have served and continue to serve in the  
120 defense of the United States.

121           Section 15000000. The governor shall annually set apart September 18, the  
122 anniversary of the founding of the United States Air Force, in recognition of its distinguished  
123 history of service as a projector of American air power in support in defense of the Nation, and  
124 by the citizens of the commonwealth who so gallantly served, and issue a proclamation  
125 recommending that the day be observed by the people in the display of the flag and in  
126 appropriate public exercises, commemorative of the services and sacrifices of the citizens of the  
127 commonwealth who have served and continue to serve in the defense of the United States.

128           Section 15PPPPPP. The governor shall annually set apart December 13, the anniversary  
129 of the founding of the National Guard, in recognition of its role as an operational reserve of the  
130 United States Army and Air Force, providing ready, well equipped personnel and equipment to  
131 support the federal military mission when called upon by the President and the governor of the  
132 commonwealth to respond to domestic emergencies, and by the citizen soldiers and airmen of the  
133 commonwealth who have unfailingly answered the call of duty, issue a proclamation  
134 recommending that the day be observed by the people in the display of the flag and in  
135 appropriate public exercises, commemorative of the services and sacrifices of the citizens of the  
136 commonwealth who have served and continue to serve in the defense of the United States.

137           Section 15QQQQQQ. The governor shall annually set apart August 4, the  
138 anniversary of the founding of the United States Coast Guard, in recognition of its distinguished  
139 history and seagoing service, and issue a proclamation recommending that the day be observed  
140 by the people in the display of the flag and in appropriate public exercises, commemorative of  
141 the services and sacrifices of the citizens of the commonwealth who have served and continue to  
142 serve in the defense of the United States.



143

144 SECTION XX. Chapter 60 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby amended by  
145 inserting after section 35 the following section:-

146 Section 35A. (a) No municipality shall publish or cause to be published the name,  
147 or other individually identifying information, of a veteran still owing a tax pursuant to this  
148 chapter after it has become due and payable.

149 (b) A municipality may communicate through the municipality's veteran service  
150 officer in order to provide notice and information related to a tax due and payable under this  
151 chapter to the veteran owing such tax.

152 SECTION 5. Chapter 112 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby amended by  
153 inserting after section 84C the following section:-

154 Section 84D. Every licensed funeral director, or his or her agent or servant, before  
155 an agreement as to the price of the merchandise and service is made, shall make available to all  
156 potential clients information regarding funeral and burial benefits for veterans as set forth in  
157 section 7 and 8 of chapter 115 and shall give or cause to be given to a client, a written statement  
158 verifying that the funeral director, or his or her agent or servant, make such information available  
159 to the potential client. The written statement shall be signed by the funeral director, or his or her  
160 agent or servant, and the potential client before an agreement as to the price of the merchandise  
161 and service is made. A funeral director who fails to comply with this section shall be punished by  
162 a fine of not more than \$1,000.

163

164 SECTION 6. Chapter 23K of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after  
165 section 20 the following section:-

166 Section 20A. (a) As used in this section, the following words shall, unless the context  
167 clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

168 “Limited slot machine establishment”, the premises owned or leased by a veterans’  
169 organization for use by its members in good standing.

170 “Limited slot machine license”, a gaming license issued by the commission that permits a  
171 veterans’ organization to operate a gaming establishment with no table games and not more than  
172 5 slot machines at a limited slot machine establishment.

173 “Limited slot machine licensee”, a veterans’ organization that holds a limited slot  
174 machine license for its limited slot machine establishment.

175 “Local licensing authority”, the local licensing authority in the city or town in which the  
176 limited slot machine establishment is located.

177 “Veterans’ organization”, any veterans’ organization that is: (i) incorporated by the  
178 Congress of the United States and (ii) included in section 4E of chapter 9.

179 (b) The commission may issue a limited slot machine license to veterans’ organizations  
180 in the commonwealth.

181 A limited slot machine license shall only be issued to a veterans’ organization that: (i) has  
182 been organized and actively functioning as a veterans’ organization for not less than 5 years prior  
183 to being issued a license; (ii) has received the approval of the local licensing authority; and (iii)

184 has been deemed suitable and qualified pursuant to regulations adopted by the commission  
185 pursuant to subsection (l).

186 No limited slot machine license issued to a veterans' organization pursuant to this section  
187 shall be transferred or assigned.

188 (c) A limited slot machine license issued by the commission pursuant to this section may  
189 be suspended or revoked at the discretion of the commission or upon written request to the  
190 commission by the local licensing authority. The suspension or revocation of a license issued  
191 pursuant to this section may be appealed by the limited slot machine licensee to the full  
192 commission, and the commission shall hear the appeal on the record. The decision rendered by  
193 the commission after the hearing shall be final and the licensee shall not be entitled to further  
194 review; provided, however, that in the case of a license revocation, the licensee shall be entitled  
195 to reapply for a license not less than 5 years from the date in which the final decision of the  
196 commission was issued.

197 (d) A limited slot machine licensee shall limit the promotion and operation of, and access  
198 to, slot machines to members in good standing of the veterans' organization; provided, that no  
199 member of the veterans' organization holding a limited slot machine license shall receive  
200 remuneration in any form for time or effort devoted to the promotion or operation of the slot  
201 machines. No member of the general public shall be permitted access to any slot machine in a  
202 limited slot machine establishment.

203 (e) The profits of any slot machines shall be the property of the limited slot machine  
204 licensee, and shall be used for charitable, fraternal or civic purposes, including, but not limited  
205 to, veterans' benefits.

206 (f) A limited slot machine license issued pursuant to this section shall be valid for a  
207 period of 5 years. The commission shall establish procedures for application and renewal and  
208 may establish a fee for application or renewal not to exceed \$500. Application and renewal fees  
209 shall be deposited into the Gaming Revenue Fund established in section 59.

210 (g) Each licensee shall keep accurate records and books showing: (i) the total amount of  
211 all monies deposited by members in good standing of the veterans' organization who played the  
212 slot machines located in the limited slot machine establishment; (ii) the expenses incurred; and  
213 (iii) the name and address of each person receiving greater than \$100 in winnings in a 24-hour  
214 period. A separate checking account shall be kept of receipts and expenditures. Money for  
215 expenses shall be withdrawn only by checks having preprinted consecutive numbers and made  
216 payable to a specific person or corporation. No check shall be made payable to cash. All monies  
217 expended for said charitable, fraternal or civic purposes shall be duly and accurately recorded as  
218 to specific amounts expended and the purposes for which said amounts were expended. Proceeds  
219 from the operation of the slot machines shall be kept in a separate bank account and the licensee  
220 shall file an annual report on or before December 31 of each year of the charitable, fraternal and  
221 civic disbursements made during the preceding year with the commission and the local licensing  
222 authority in such form as the commission may prescribe. Such annual report shall be a public  
223 record. The commission and the local licensing authority, or their duly authorized agents or  
224 representatives, shall at all times have access to the limited slot machine establishment, as well  
225 as the records and books of any licensee for the purpose of examining and checking the same.

226 (h) Each licensee shall file a return with the commission, on a form prepared by the  
227 commission, and shall pay therewith a tax of 5 per cent of the gross profits derived from the slot

228 machines located in the limited slot machine establishment, which shall be deposited into the  
229 Gaming Revenue Fund established in section 59.

230 (i) No person under 21 years of age shall be permitted in that portion of any building or  
231 premises of the licensee during such time as a slot machine is being played.

232 (j) A limited slot machine establishment shall keep conspicuously posted on their  
233 premises a notice containing the following statement: "If you or someone you know has a  
234 gambling problem and wants help, call the Massachusetts Council on Gaming and Health on the  
235 Safer Gaming Education Line at 1-800-426-1234 or the Massachusetts Department of Public  
236 Health helpline at 1-800-327-5050."

237 (k) Limited slot machine licensees shall only acquire slot machines from a person  
238 licensed as a gaming vendor under section 31.

239 (l) The commission shall, consistent with the public objectives of this chapter established  
240 in section 1, promulgate regulations for the implementation, administration and enforcement of  
241 this section including, without limitation, regulations that prescribe: (i) the method and form of  
242 application which an applicant for licensure shall follow and complete before consideration by  
243 the commission; (ii) the information to be furnished by an applicant for a limited slot machine  
244 license or for the renewal of a limited slot machine license; (iii) suitability standards for  
245 applicants for licensure pursuant to this section; (iv) the criteria for evaluation of the application  
246 for a limited slot machine license and qualifications for licensure pursuant to this section; (v) the  
247 information to be furnished by a veterans' organization relating to the members of the veterans'  
248 organization tasked with managing the slot machines; (vi) criteria for eligibility for licensure  
249 under this section; (vii) conditions on the operation and control of a limited slot machine

250 establishment; and (viii) grounds and procedures for the revocation or suspension of a limited  
251 slot machine license.

252 SECTION 7. Chapter 75 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after  
253 section 34A the following section:-

254 Section 34B. (a) Unless otherwise prohibited by any general or special law to the  
255 contrary, the University of Massachusetts medical school shall develop a continuing education  
256 program for clinical and non-clinical counselors serving institutions within the system of public  
257 institutions of higher education established pursuant to section 5 of chapter 15A. The program  
258 shall include education on the following subjects: (i) military culture and its influence on service  
259 member and veteran psychology; (ii) deployment cycle stressors as they impact campus life for  
260 students who are service members and veterans; (iii) outreach strategies for administrative, non-  
261 clinical and clinical services; (iv) symptoms of depression, suicide, deployment-related,  
262 insomnia, substance use, and post-traumatic stress disorder; and (v) available resources and  
263 methods of referral.

264 (b) The University of Massachusetts medical school shall: (i) develop the continuing  
265 education program, including the curriculum thereof, required by section 34B of chapter 75 of  
266 the General Laws within 180 days after passage of this act; and (ii) conduct training for clinical  
267 and non-clinical counselors serving institutions within the Commonwealth's public institution of  
268 higher education within 545 days after passage of this act.

269

270 SECTION 8. Resolved, that there shall be a special commission to investigate and report  
271 on a suitable memorial to be erected to commemorate Deborah Samson, the official heroine of  
272 the commonwealth.

273 The special commission shall: (i) promote public support for and education on the  
274 importance of Deborah Samson to the War of Independence; (ii) identify a location for a suitable  
275 memorial for Deborah Samson; and (iii) evaluate the public and private resources available to  
276 erect and maintain the suitable memorial.

277 The commission shall consist of: the house and senate chairs of the joint committee on  
278 veterans and federal affairs, who shall serve as co-chairs; 2 additional members of the house of  
279 representatives, 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader of the house; 2 additional  
280 members of the senate, 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader of the senate; the  
281 commissioner of veterans' services or a designee; the adjutant general of the commonwealth or a  
282 designee; and 7 members to be appointed by the governor, 1 of whom shall be a female veteran,  
283 1 of whom shall be a representative of the women veterans' network in the department of  
284 veterans' services, 1 of whom shall be a representative of the advisory committee on women  
285 veterans established under section 2 of chapter 115 of the General Laws, 1 of whom shall be a  
286 representative of the Department of Massachusetts Veterans of Foreign Wars of The United  
287 States, Inc., 1 of whom shall be a representative of The American Legion, Department of  
288 Massachusetts Inc., 1 of whom shall be a representative of the AMVETS Department of  
289 Massachusetts Service Foundation, Incorp. and 1 of whom shall be a representative of Disabled  
290 American Veterans, Department of Massachusetts, Inc.

291           The commission shall submit a report of its investigation and recommendations,  
292 including any drafts of legislation necessary to implement its recommendations, to the clerks of  
293 the house of representatives and senate not later than 183 days following enactment of this  
294 resolve.

295           SECTION 9. Chapter 115 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after  
296 section 15 the following section:-

297           Section 16. (a) There shall be a veteran equality review board to ensure veterans  
298 dishonorably discharged due to sexual orientation under 10 U.S. Code § 654, also known as the  
299 don't ask, don't tell policy, receive state-based veteran benefits. The board shall consist of 5  
300 voting members who, by education or experience, are knowledgeable of veterans benefits and  
301 programs and have demonstrated interest in veteran affairs. A majority of the members shall be  
302 veterans. 2 members shall be appointed by the Secretary of Veterans' Services, 1 member shall  
303 be appointed by the Governor, 1 member shall be appointed by the Senate President and 1  
304 member shall be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives. Members shall serve  
305 for 5 years. The members shall vote to select a chair. A vacancy shall be filled for the balance of  
306 the unexpired term in the same manner as the original appointment. duties. A majority of the  
307 appointed and serving members of the board shall constitute a quorum of the board for the  
308 transaction of business. An action of the board shall be approved by a majority vote of the  
309 members present at a meeting where a quorum is present. The members of the board shall serve  
310 without compensation.

311           (b) The board shall meet as often as deemed necessary by the chairperson based on the  
312 number of applications pending before the board. The board shall review each application



313 submitted and render a recommendation to the secretary of veterans' services as to whether the  
314 veteran's sexual orientation was the reason for an other than honorable discharge. The board shall  
315 review each application not later than thirty days after receipt and render a written  
316 recommendation to the secretary not later than thirty days after such review.

317 (c) A veteran who received a discharge that was not honorable and who believes such  
318 discharge characterization was based on such veteran's sexual orientation may file an application  
319 for state-based veteran benefits. Said veteran may include evidence supporting his or her claim  
320 that such discharge characterization was based on the veteran's sexual orientation.

321 (d) The department of veterans' services shall promulgate a standardized application  
322 form enumerating the required documentation necessary for filing an application under this  
323 subsection and shall make such form available on the department of veterans' services web site  
324 along with filing instructions.

325 (e) The secretary shall issue a written decision not later than ten days after receipt of the  
326 board's recommendation, approving or denying the application. If the secretary approves the  
327 application, such veteran shall be eligible for state-based veteran benefits.

328 (f) If the secretary's decision is unfavorable to the veteran, the veteran may file a request  
329 for reconsideration not later than thirty days after receipt of the secretary's decision. The veteran  
330 may provide additional documentation for their application.