

SENATE No. 1878

SENATE, Wednesday, October 9, 2013.

The committee on Ways and Means, to whom was referred the Senate Bill relative to veterans' allowances, labor, outreach, and recognition (Senate, No. 1876),- reports, recommending that the same ought to pass with an amendment substituting a new draft of the same title (Senate, No. 1878).

For the committee,
Stephen M. Brewer..

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Thirteen

An Act relative to veterans' allowances, labor, outreach, and recognition.

Whereas, The deferred operation of this act would tend to defeat its purpose, which is to provide forthwith benefits to certain veterans and servicemembers, therefore it is hereby declared to be an emergency law, necessary for the immediate preservation of the public convenience.

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

SECTION 1. To provide for benefits for certain veterans and servicemembers in the commonwealth in fiscal year 2014, the sums set forth in section 2 are hereby appropriated from the General Fund for the several purposes and subject to the conditions specified in this act and subject to laws regulating the disbursement of public funds; provided, however, that notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, appropriations made herein shall not revert and shall be available for expenditure until June 30, 2015. The sums appropriated in this act shall be in addition to any amounts previously appropriated and made available for these purposes.

SECTION 2.

JUDICIARY

Trial Court

0330-0344 For administration and transportation costs associated with a veterans court project pilot program and study established in section 33 of this act \$100,000.

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15 EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

16 Department of Veterans' Services

17 1410-0024 For costs associated with implementing the training and certification of veterans'
18 benefits and services officers..... \$350,000

19 SECTION 3. Section 7 of chapter 4 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
20 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the definition "Active service in the armed
21 forces" the following 2 definitions:-

22 "military duty", full-time duty in the active military service of the United States,
23 regardless of duration or purpose; provided, however, that active military service shall include
24 full-time training duty, annual training duty, and attendance, while in the active military service,
25 at a school designated as a service school by law or by the Secretary of the Department of
26 Defense; provided further, that military duty shall also include full-time National Guard or
27 Reserve duty; provided further, that any member of the armed forces, reserve component of the
28 armed forces or National Guard shall also be considered on military duty if that person is on
29 inactive duty training, funeral honors duty, traveling directly to or from such active or inactive
30 duty or training or while training before the commencement of military assignment or between
31 successive periods of such active or inactive duty.

32 "Gold Star", the status of any member of the armed forces, reserve component of the
33 armed forces or National Guard who was deceased due to an injury, illness or disease, not due to
34 gross negligence or misconduct of the member, which was incurred or aggravated while serving
35 on military duty.

36 SECTION 4. Subsection (a) of section 8E of chapter 12 of the General Laws, as so
37 appearing, is hereby amended by inserting, after the words "U.S.A.", in line 17, the following
38 words:- ; Department of Massachusetts, Marine Corps League, Inc.

39 SECTION 5. Chapter 15A of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the
40 following section:-

41 Section 43. (a) No student at a postsecondary institution shall incur academic or financial
42 penalties by virtue of performing military service on behalf of the United States. A student who
43 enrolls in an academic course at any of the institutions in subsection (b) but is unable to complete
44 an academic course because that student is called to, or enlists in, active duty, as defined in
45 section 1 of chapter 15E, shall have the option to complete the course at a later date without
46 penalty or withdraw from the course with a full refund of fees and tuition paid. If the academic
47 course is no longer available upon the student's return from active duty, the student shall be
48 permitted to complete a replacement course for equivalent credit without penalty. If the student
49 chooses to withdraw from the course, the student's record shall reflect that the withdrawal is due
50 to active military service.

51 (b) This section shall apply to all postsecondary institutions in the commonwealth
52 including: (i) the system of public institutions of higher education, as defined in section 5 of
53 chapter 15A; (ii) private occupation schools, as defined in section 263 of chapter 112; and (iii)
54 private colleges, universities or other institutions of higher learning.

55 SECTION 6. Subsection (m) of section 8 of chapter 15E of the General Laws, as
56 appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the word "military"
57 in line 86, the following words:- ", National Guard or Reserve".

58 SECTION 7. Section 67A of chapter 33 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby
59 amended by inserting, after the word "action", in line 3, the following:- or who died in service
60 while in a designated combat area in the line of duty.

61 SECTION 8. Section 8A of chapter 58 of the General Laws is hereby repealed.

62 SECTION 9. Section 5 of chapter 59 of the General Laws is hereby amended by striking
63 out the first paragraph, as appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, and inserting in place thereof
64 the following paragraph:-

65 The following property shall be exempt from taxation and the date of determination as to
66 age, ownership or other qualifying factors required by any clause shall be July first of each year
67 unless another meaning is clearly apparent from the context; provided, however, that any person
68 who receives an exemption under clause Seventeenth, Seventeenth C, Seventeenth C½,
69 Seventeenth D, Twenty-second, Twenty-second A, Twenty-second B, Twenty-second C,
70 Twenty-second D, Twenty-second E, Twenty-second F, Thirty-seventh, Thirty-seventh A, Forty-
71 first, Forty-first B, Forty-first C, Forty-first C½, Forty-second, Forty-third, Fifty-sixth or Fifty-
72 seventh shall not receive an exemption on the same property under any other provision of this
73 section, except clause Eighteenth or Forty-fifth.

74 SECTION 10. Clause twenty-second E of said section 5 of said chapter 59, as so
75 appearing, is here by amended by striking out the last paragraph.

76 SECTION 11. Said section 5 of said chapter 59 is hereby amended by inserting after
77 clause Twenty-second E, as so appearing, the following clause:-

78 Twenty-second F, Real estate of soldiers and sailors, who are veterans, as defined in the
79 forty-third clause of section 7 of chapter 4, and their spouses, who according to the records of the
80 Veterans Administration or of any branch of the armed forces of the United States by reason of
81 injury received while in such service and in the line of duty are paraplegics; provided that: the
82 veteran or spouse is a legal resident of the commonwealth; the veteran's last discharge or release
83 from the armed forces was under other than dishonorable conditions; the veteran was domiciled
84 in the commonwealth for at least 6 months prior to entering such service or resided in the
85 commonwealth for 5 consecutive years prior to the date of filing for exemption under this clause;
86 provided, that such real estate is occupied as the veteran's domicile by such person; and provided
87 further, that if the property is greater than a single-family house, then only that value of so much
88 of the house as is occupied by the person as such person's domicile shall be exempted. An
89 exemption under this clause shall continue unchanged for the benefit of the surviving spouse
90 after the death of such disabled veteran as long as the surviving spouse of the qualified veteran
91 shall remain an owner and occupant of a domicile subject to the exemption.

92 No real estate shall be exempt if the assessors adjudge that it has been conveyed to a
93 soldier or sailor to evade taxation.

94 After the assessors have allowed an exemption under this clause no further evidence of
95 the existence of the facts required by this clause shall be required in any subsequent year in the
96 city or town in which the exemption has been allowed; provided, however, that the assessors
97 may refuse to allow an exemption in any subsequent year if they become aware that the soldier
98 or sailor did not satisfy all of the requisites of this clause at the time the exemption was first
99 granted.

100 Two thousand dollars of this exemption or up to the sum of \$175, whichever basis is
101 applicable, shall be borne by the city or town; the balance shall be borne by the commonwealth;
102 and the state treasurer shall annually reimburse the city or town for the amount of the tax which
103 otherwise would have been collected on account of this balance.

104 Notwithstanding this section, in any city or town which accepts this paragraph, said
105 exemptions available under clauses twenty-second, twenty-second A, twenty-second B, twenty-
106 second C, twenty-second D, twenty-second E and twenty-second F may be granted to otherwise

107 eligible persons who have resided in the commonwealth for 1 year prior to the date of filing for
108 exemptions under the applicable clause.

109 SECTION 12. Section 5C of said chapter 59, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
110 striking out, in lines 13 and 14, the words “of section eight A of chapter fifty-eight and”.

111 SECTION 13. Said chapter 59 is hereby amended by inserting after section 5C the
112 following section:-

113 Section 5C½. In a city or town which accepts this section and is certified by the
114 commissioner to be assessing all property at full and fair cash valuation, a taxpayer who
115 otherwise qualifies for an exemption under any clause specifically listed in the first paragraph of
116 section 5 for which receipt of another exemption on the same property is prohibited, shall be
117 granted an additional exemption which shall be uniform for all exemptions and the amount of
118 which shall not exceed 100 per cent of the exemption for which the taxpayer qualifies, as may be
119 determined by the legislative body of the city or town, subject to its charter, not later than the
120 beginning of the fiscal year to which the tax relates. Notwithstanding any provision of this
121 chapter to the contrary, the exemption shall be in addition to any exemption allowable under
122 section 5; provided, however, that in no instance shall the taxable valuation of such property,
123 after all applicable exemptions, be reduced below 10 per cent of its full and fair cash valuation,
124 except through the applicability of clause Eighteenth of section 5; and provided, further, that the
125 additional exemption shall not result in any taxpayer paying less than the taxes paid in the
126 preceding fiscal year. Acceptance of this section by a city or town shall not increase the amount
127 which it otherwise would have been reimbursed by the commonwealth under the respective
128 clause.

129 SECTION 14. Section 5N of chapter 59 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
130 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the figure “4”, in line 5, the following
131 words:- or a spouse of a veteran in the case where the veteran is deceased or has a service-
132 connected disability.

133 SECTION 15. Section 59 of said chapter 59, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
134 striking out the third paragraph and inserting in place thereof the following paragraph:-

135 An application for exemption under clause Seventeenth, Seventeenth C, Seventeenth C½,
136 Seventeenth D, Eighteenth, Twenty-second, Twenty-second A, Twenty-second B, Twenty-
137 second C, Twenty-second D, Twenty-second E, Twenty-second F, Thirty-seventh, Thirty-
138 seventh A, Forty-first, Forty-first B, Forty-first C, Forty-first C½, Forty-second, Forty-third,
139 Fifty-second, Fifty-third, Fifty-sixth and Fifty-seventh of section 5 may be made on or before
140 December 15 of the year to which the tax relates, or if the bill or notice is first sent after
141 September 15 of such year, within 3 months after the bill or notice is so sent.

142 SECTION 16. Chapter 68 of the General is hereby amended by inserting after section 19
143 the following section:-

144 Section 19A. Any person or charitable organization established for an advocacy,
145 benevolent, educational, humane, patriotic, philanthropic, scientific or social welfare purpose on
146 behalf of veterans or the military, which intends to solicit contributions from persons within the
147 commonwealth, or have contributions solicited on its behalf by other charitable organizations,
148 shall, prior to such solicitation, apply to be a qualified veterans’ charitable organization on a
149 form issued by the division that shall include, but not be limited to: (i) the name of the
150 organization and the purpose for which it is organized; (ii) the address of the organization and
151 the address of any offices in this commonwealth or, if the organization does not maintain an
152 office, the name and address of the person having custody of its financial records; and (iii) the

153 charitable purpose for which the contributions to be solicited shall be used. The secretary of the
154 department of veterans' services shall publish on the department's website a list of qualified
155 veterans' charitable organizations who have complied with this section. The secretary shall place
156 any qualified veterans' charitable organization on that list for a period of 3 years. Any person or
157 organization applying for qualified veterans' charitable organization status shall be exempt from
158 any registration fee or renewal fee under section 19.

159 SECTION 17. Section 28 of said chapter 68, as appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, is
160 hereby amended by adding the following subsection:-

161 (f) No person or organization shall claim to be a representative of a veterans' charitable
162 organization with the intent to solicit contributions that benefit or profit any person or
163 organization other than the qualified veterans' charitable organization.

164 SECTION 18. Section 1 of chapter 90, as so appearing, is hereby amended by inserting
165 after the definition of "Intersecting way" the following definition:-

166 "Killed in action", a casualty classification determined by the United States Department
167 of Defense when a member of the armed forces of the United States has been killed while
168 performing military operations while serving outside the United States in a conflict recognized
169 by the United States Department of Defense.

170 SECTION 19. Section 2 of said chapter 90, as so appearing, is hereby further amended by
171 inserting after the word "RECIPIENT", in line 407, the following words:- and the words
172 "COMBAT WOUNDED".

173 SECTION 20. Said section 2 of said chapter 90, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
174 striking out the twenty-first paragraph and inserting in place thereof the following paragraph:-

175 The registrar shall furnish without charge to the owner of private passenger motor vehicle
176 who is Gold Star parent, child, sibling, grandchild or spouse of a member of the military, upon
177 presentation of satisfactory evidence of such status as determined by the registrar, a distinctive
178 registration plate that reads "Gold Star Family" for 1 private passenger motor vehicle owned and
179 principally used by that person or a distinctive "Gold Star Family" emblem to be affixed to a
180 registration plate for a motorcycle privately owned and principally used by that person. The
181 registrar may issue a distinctive "Gold Star Family" registration of up to 6 characters for 1
182 private passenger motor vehicle owned and principally used by that person. Provided further,
183 that a Gold Star parent, child, sibling, grandchild or spouse of a member of the military that was
184 killed in action or otherwise died as a result of immediate injuries sustained from such action
185 may have a "KIA" designation on the "Gold Star Family" emblem affixed to a registration plate
186 for a private passenger motor vehicle or motorcycle privately owned and principally used by that
187 person. The registrar shall furnish at no additional cost a "KIA" designation on any previously
188 issued "Gold Star" registration plate for an individual who meets the requirements of this
189 section.

190 SECTION 21. Section 2E of said chapter 90, as so appearing, is hereby amended by
191 adding the following subsection:-

192 (d) The registrar shall furnish, upon application, to the owner of a private passenger
193 motor vehicle, a distinctive registration plate which shall display on its face the words "Support
194 our Veterans", to honor men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces.
195 There shall be a fee of not less than \$50 for such plates in addition to the established registration
196 fee for a private passenger motor vehicle, which shall be payable at the time of registration of the
197 vehicle and at each renewal thereof. The portion of the total remaining fee, after the deduction
198 of costs directly attributable to the issuance of such plates, shall be deposited in a registry

199 retained revenue account. Of the remaining portion of such fee, there shall be an application
200 process designed and administered by the secretary of the department of veterans' services to
201 distribute such funds once during each fiscal year for the purpose of administering grants to
202 programs or organizations that fund additional services or conduct research, including, but not
203 limited to, the following: (i) veterans' mental health and substance abuse; (ii) veterans' housing
204 and homelessness; (iii) veterans' health care; (iv) veterans' disability benefits; (v) long-term
205 care of veterans; (vi) veteran employment and employment training; (ix) veterans' education;
206 and (x) Gold Star family support. In order to expend funds from this account, the secretary of the
207 department of veterans' services shall appoint a 3-member funding authorization committee. The
208 committee shall authorize the expenditure of funds from this special fund through an application
209 process developed and administered by the committee. The secretary shall be a member and act
210 as the chairperson of the committee. One member of the committee shall be a member of the
211 Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services, who shall be appointed by the governor.
212 One member of the committee shall be a veteran representative of the public with no financial
213 interest in funding programs and services, who shall be appointed by the governor. No member
214 of the legislature shall serve on the committee. Any entity awarded funds under this section, in
215 any fiscal year, shall not be eligible for funding for the next 2 subsequent fiscal years.

216 SECTION 22. Section 1B of chapter 112 of the General Laws, as so appearing, is hereby
217 amended by adding the following subsection:-

218 (f) The director and each of the boards of registration and examination under the
219 supervision of the director shall waive the initial license application fee or certification fee
220 granted under subsections (a) to (e), inclusive.

221 SECTION 23. Chapter 115 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
222 section 3A the following section:—

223 Section 3B. (a) The secretary of veterans' services shall establish standards and
224 promulgate regulations for the mandatory training and certification of veterans' benefits and
225 services officers. Veterans' benefits and services officers shall be trained and certified within 6
226 months of the officer's appointment under section 3. Training shall be offered annually and shall
227 be administered by the secretary of the department of veterans' services and approved by the
228 Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association and Massachusetts Municipal Association.

229 The secretary shall formulate a certification test in conjunction with the Massachusetts
230 Veterans' Service Officers Association, which shall ensure the candidate possesses the core
231 knowledge to effectively serve veterans. The secretary shall make the test available at the
232 mandatory annual training and shall provide a reasonable schedule of make-up training and
233 testing. The certification test shall assess areas of knowledge including, but not limited to, the
234 following: veterans' benefits contained in this chapter; federal and local benefits, including
235 employment, education, health care, retirement and other veterans' benefits; and alternative
236 resources, including those partially or wholly subsidized by the federal government, such as
237 Medicaid, supplemental security income and social security disability benefits and federal
238 pension and compensation entitlements. At the request of any appointing authority, the secretary
239 shall offer training and testing to any person who works for or in conjunction with a certified
240 veterans service officer or agent. Upon petition to the secretary by the appointing authority, a
241 person appointed as a veterans' benefits and services officer may be exempted by the secretary
242 from the requirements of this section.

243 (b) A person who receives an appointment as a veterans' benefits and services officer, or
244 who is currently employed as a veterans' benefits and services officer under section 3, shall be

245 certified. To be certified as a veterans' benefits and services officer, the candidate shall, at a
246 minimum, meet the following qualifications: (i) be appointed locally under section 3; (ii) attend a
247 mandatory training within 6 months of appointment, administered by the secretary of the
248 department of veterans' services; (iii) attend a mandatory training once every calendar year; (iv)
249 take and pass the test offered at each administered training once every 3 years. The secretary of
250 veterans' services shall consider candidates who complete the requirements in this section a
251 certified veterans' benefits and services officer.

252 As used in this section, the term "veterans' benefits and services officer" shall include: (i)
253 full-time and part-time veterans' agents under this chapter, chapter 471 of the acts of 1972,
254 chapter 68 of the acts of 1984 and title 108 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations; (ii) full-
255 time directors of veterans' services districts under this chapter, said chapter 471 of the acts of
256 1972, said chapter 68 of the acts of 1984 and title 108 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations;
257 (iii) county veterans' agents under chapter 128 of the acts of 1982; and (iv) the veterans' benefits
258 and services commissioner in and for the city of Boston under this chapter.

259 (c) During the period of employment, a person holding a veterans' benefits and services
260 officer certificate under this section shall be under the direct supervision of the appointing
261 authority in section 3. The appointing authority shall regularly evaluate the performance of
262 assigned duties by the veterans' benefits and services officer.

263 (d) Failure of a veterans' benefits and services officer to comply with this chapter shall
264 result in reduction of the reimbursement allowance, paid by the commonwealth under section 6,
265 from 75 per cent to 50 per cent. The reduction shall remain in effect: (i) for a time period
266 designated by the secretary; (ii) until the appointing authority is in full compliance; (iii) until a
267 plan is agreed upon by the appointing authority and the secretary to be in full compliance by a
268 date agreed to by the secretary and the appointing authority; or (iv) by removal of the veterans'
269 benefits and services officer.

270 (e) The department shall, for any reduction in the reimbursement allowance made under
271 subsection (d), deposit said reimbursement in a trust account. Upon the appointing authority's
272 full compliance under subsection (d), the department shall add this amount to a subsequent
273 reimbursement made to the city or town under section 6.

274 SECTION 24. Chapter 149 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
275 section 44¹/₂, the following section:-

276 Section 44³/₄. Notwithstanding chapter 151B, a private, nonpublic employer in the
277 commonwealth may provide a preference in promotion or hiring to: (1) a veteran; (2) the spouse
278 of an honorably discharged veteran who the United States Veterans' Administration determines
279 to be 100 per cent disabled as a result of enemy action or a service-connected accident; or (3) the
280 surviving spouse of a veteran.

281 SECTION 25. Chapter 272 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after
282 section 42A the following section:-

283 Section 42B. Whoever willfully pickets, loiters or otherwise creates a disturbance within
284 1,000 feet of a funeral home, church, temple, military funeral procession, burial or other building
285 where military funeral services are being held, shall be punished by a fine of not more than
286 \$2,000 or by imprisonment for not more than 2 years in a house of correction, or both.

287 SECTION 26. Section 4 of chapter 73 of the acts of 1986 is hereby repealed.

288 SECTION 27. The secretary of health and human services shall establish and implement
289 an ongoing veterans' home modification program through the Massachusetts rehabilitation
290 commission. The commissioner of the Massachusetts rehabilitation commission, in collaboration

291 with the secretary of veterans' services, shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary to carry
292 out a veterans' home modifications program for any veteran who was called to active duty after
293 September 11, 2001, who has suffered a service connected disability and who requires home
294 modifications services to function more independently in the veteran's home and community.
295 The purpose of the veterans' home modification program is to provide funding on behalf of said
296 veterans for home modifications services made necessary by the functional limitations associated
297 with the veteran's service connected disability. The commissioner and secretary of veterans'
298 services shall, to the best of commissioner's and secretary's knowledge, identify veterans eligible
299 for this program and provide a cost estimate for the purpose of appropriations for this program
300 for fiscal year 2015 and beyond. Said cost estimate shall be reported to the house and senate
301 committee on ways and means and the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs not later
302 than March 1, 2014.

303 SECTION 28. (a) There is hereby established the Massachusetts Servicemember Post-
304 Deployment Council to make recommendations regarding the implementation of a program in
305 Massachusetts to support service members transitioning to civilian life after deployment.

306 (b) The council shall consist of 25 members: 2 members of the senate appointed by the
307 president of the senate, 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on veterans and
308 federal affairs and 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on mental health and
309 substance abuse; 1 member of the senate appointed by the minority leader of the senate, who
310 shall be a member of the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, the
311 joint committee on labor and workforce development or the joint committee on housing; 2
312 members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house of
313 representatives, 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on veterans and federal
314 affairs and 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on mental health and substance
315 abuse; 1 member of the house of representatives appointed by the minority leader of the house
316 of representatives, who shall be a member of the joint committee on children, families and
317 persons with disabilities, the joint committee on labor and workforce development or the joint
318 committee on housing; 1 member shall be the secretary of health and human services, or a
319 designee from the executive staff to include representation from the department of public health,
320 the department of mental health, the department of children and families and the Massachusetts
321 rehabilitation commission; 1 member shall be the secretary of veterans' services, or a designee;
322 1 member shall be the adjutant general of the national guard, or a designee; 1 member shall be
323 the commissioner of the Massachusetts rehabilitation commission, or a designee; 1 member
324 shall be the undersecretary of the department of housing and community development, or a
325 designee; 1 member shall be the secretary of the executive office of labor and workforce
326 development, or a designee; 1 member shall be the secretary of the executive office of education,
327 or a designee; and 13 members shall be appointed by the governor, 2 of whom shall be veterans
328 of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom, and 1 from a list of nominees
329 submitted by each of the following organizations: Massachusetts Coalition for Suicide
330 Prevention, Massachusetts Psychological Association, Massachusetts Psychiatric Society, Inc.,
331 Massachusetts Association of Mental Health, Association for Behavioral Healthcare, Inc.,
332 Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association, Massachusetts Women Veterans
333 Network, The Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital Home Base Program,
334 the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund, the federal Veterans Administration, the Massachusetts
335 Hospital Association and the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers.

336 (c) The term of office for each appointed member shall be 2 years, or until a successor is
337 appointed in the case of a vacancy. The council shall, at its first organizational meeting, elect a
338 member to serve as chairperson for a 2-year term. The council shall also elect a vice-chairperson
339 for a 2-year term and a clerk for a 2-year term. No member shall receive any compensation for
340 serving on the council.

341 (d) The council shall perform and make recommendations pertaining to how best
342 operationalize and quantify the following duties, including, but not limited to: (i) examine and
343 evaluate the effectiveness of veterans' suicide prevention policies; (ii) examine and evaluate the
344 effectiveness of suicide prevention training for veterans' personnel; (iii) develop
345 recommendations on ways in which veterans may be screened upon return from deployment; (iv)
346 develop recommendations for methods by which the commonwealth may identify, evaluate and
347 refer servicemembers returning to civilian life post-deployment for assistance with education,
348 employment, healthcare, housing and other services; (v) provide recommendations for improving
349 communication between mental health services and potentially at-risk veterans; (vi) provide
350 recommendations for improving observation and treatment plans for returning veterans; (vii)
351 develop recommendations for providing mental health counseling services to combat the effects
352 of post-traumatic stress disorder for post-deployment veterans (viii) examine ways in which the
353 commonwealth can reduce stress, anxiety and depression among returning veterans; (ix) provide
354 recommendations on improving health access assistance; and (x) identify the needs of women
355 veterans relative to issues including, but not limited to, compensation, rehabilitation, outreach,
356 health care, education and other issues facing women veterans in the community. The council
357 may hold public hearings to assist in the collection and evaluation of data and testimony.

358 (e) The council shall submit its findings and recommendations, including a detailed re-
359 entry program plan relative to servicemembers who return to civilian life after deployment,
360 together with recommendations for legislation to carry out those recommendations into effect by
361 filing the same with the house and senate clerks, the house and senate committees on ways and
362 means, the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs and the joint committee on mental
363 health and substance abuse not later than September 15, 2015.

364 SECTION 29. (a) The department of public health shall issue guidance to acute hospitals
365 and ambulance service providers in order to establish the systematic identification of veterans
366 and military service members following clinical care to effect appropriate referrals consistent
367 with the privacy protections offered by federal and state laws and regulations to the department
368 of veterans' services and to enable and promote access to all available resources, supports and
369 benefits.

370 (b) The department of veterans' services shall submit quarterly aggregate data reports on
371 all referrals to the department of public health.

372 SECTION 30. (a) There is hereby established a special commission to study and make
373 recommendations to create a state office of veterans' employment and business assistance with a
374 goal of expanding business and employment opportunities for veterans.

375 (b) The commission shall consist of 16 members: 3 members of the house of
376 representatives, 2 of whom shall be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives and
377 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives; 3 members
378 of the senate, 2 of whom shall be appointed by the president of the senate and 1 of whom shall be
379 appointed by the minority leader of the senate; the secretary of labor and workforce
380 development, or a designee; the secretary of the department of veterans' services, or a designee;
381 the secretary of housing and economic development, or a designee; and 6 members appointed by

382 the governor, which shall consist of 1 member from each of the following organizations:
383 Veterans Business Council, Northeast Veteran Resource Center, Inc., Massachusetts Small
384 Business Development Center, Center for Women and Enterprise, and Veterans, Inc. The
385 speaker of the house of representatives and the president of the senate shall appoint 2 members
386 of the commission as co-chairpersons.

387 (c) The commission shall: (i) examine and report on barriers to employment facing
388 returning veterans; (ii) examine barriers to starting a veteran-owned business or nonprofit; (iii)
389 identify opportunities to promote the development of business enterprises and non-profit
390 organizations owned and operated by veterans; (iv) examine relationships that can be enhanced
391 between state agencies and private sector employers to promote private sector awareness of
392 barriers to veteran employment and potential benefits of hiring veterans; (v) study the feasibility
393 of state-level veteran career counseling and training options to include coordination with one-
394 stop career centers and all outreach programs and initiatives relative to veterans' employment
395 services in the commonwealth; and (v) identify opportunities to maximize revenues aimed at
396 accomplishing the goals in this section, including, but not limited to, the availability of federal
397 grants and matching funds.

398 Said examination shall include, but not be limited to: (i) a report on the number of
399 veterans residing in each municipality in the commonwealth; (ii) a report on the number of
400 veterans actively seeking employment services in each community; (iii) coordinating with local,
401 state and federal entities to estimate the number of veterans in each community currently
402 unemployed or under-employed; and (iv) determining the geographic location of each local
403 veteran employment representative assigned to career centers or other employment outreach
404 locations throughout the commonwealth. This examination shall include an assessment of
405 staffing levels, funding levels and outreach efforts performed by local veteran employment
406 representatives, as well as, a projection of underserved geographic locations in need of greater
407 veteran outreach efforts.

408 (d) The commission may hold hearings and invite testimony from experts and the public.
409 The commission shall review and identify best practices learned from similar efforts in other
410 states.

411 (e) The commission shall report to the general court the results of its investigation and
412 study and make recommendations together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry out its
413 recommendations by filing such report with the clerks of the senate and the house by not later
414 than before January 15, 2015.

415 SECTION 31. (a) There shall be a special commission to study and make
416 recommendations under chapter 115 of the General Laws. The commission shall study and
417 evaluate current laws, regulations and practices related to providing services and support to
418 veterans and make recommendations to improve the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of
419 partnerships between federal, state and local programs.

420 (b) The committee shall consist of 7 members: 2 of whom who shall be the house and
421 senate chairs of the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, or their designees, who shall
422 serve as co-chair of the commission; the secretary of the department of veterans' services, or a
423 designee; the secretary of administration and finance, or a designee; the president of the
424 Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association, or a designee; the executive director of
425 the Massachusetts Municipal Association, or a designee; and the veterans' benefits and services
426 commissioner in and for the city of Boston, or a designee.

427 (c) The commission shall: (i) study and evaluate the current system for identifying
428 veterans in need of services; (ii) study the current state-level process of providing, administering
429 and financing services and access to services; and (iii) make recommendations to enhance the
430 coordination of the actions of federal, state and local government agencies to support measurably
431 better outcomes and efficiency for community-based veterans services. The commission shall
432 evaluate the fiscal impact on local government of the current system of municipal financing of
433 veterans' benefits subject to reimbursement through state appropriations and of the rules
434 governing state and local administration of chapter 115 of the General Laws. The commission
435 shall consider alternative efficient methods of financing and administration that would improve
436 services to veterans.

437 (d) The commission shall convene its first official meeting not later than February 1,
438 2014. The commission shall file a report of the findings of its study with recommendations for
439 legislation with house and senate committees on ways and means and the joint committee on
440 veterans and federal affairs not later than December 1, 2015.

441 SECTION 32. (a) There is hereby established the Massachusetts veterans long-term care
442 and housing master plan commission. The commission shall study, evaluate and make
443 recommendations regarding the future needs surrounding housing and residential care demand
444 for veterans, spouses and dependents in the commonwealth.

445 (b) The commission shall consist of 15 members: the house of representatives and senate
446 co-chairs of the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, or their designees, who shall
447 serve as co-chairs of the commission; the secretary of the department of veterans' services, or a
448 designee; 4 members appointed by the secretary of health and human services, 1 whom shall be
449 an expert in healthcare delivery systems, 1 whom shall be an expert in healthcare facilities
450 management, 1 whom shall be a member of the board of trustees of the Soldiers' Home in
451 Massachusetts and 1 whom shall be a member of the board of trustees of the Soldiers' Home in
452 Holyoke; 1 member appointed by the secretary of administration and finance, who shall be an
453 employee of the division of capital asset management and maintenance; the president of the
454 Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association, or a designee; the executive director of
455 the interagency council on housing and homelessness, or a designee; 1 member, acting as a
456 private citizen not employed by an agency, city, town or group providing services to veterans,
457 that has extensive knowledge of the federal Veterans Administration and appointed by the
458 secretary of the department of veterans' services; 1 member, acting as a private citizen not
459 employed by an agency, city, town or group providing services to veterans, with extensive
460 knowledge of real estate, construction and development and appointed by the secretary of the
461 executive office of administration and finance; 2 members from the governor's advisory
462 committee on women veterans; 2 members, acting as private citizens not employed by a city,
463 town or group providing services to veterans, appointed by the secretary of the department of
464 veterans' services, that are combat veterans of conflicts since 2001.

465 (c) The commission shall study and evaluate the emerging changes in veterans care and
466 delivery of services relative to long-term health care and housing with the goal of ensuring all
467 services provided by the state are strategically balanced by region and are in-line with and
468 complimentary to those services provided by the federal government and other service providers.
469 The commission shall study and evaluate the current capital needs for both the Soldiers' Home in
470 Massachusetts and the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke and examine best practices in other states for
471 the purpose of developing a long-term master plan and recommendations relative to long-term
472 capital spending.

473 (d) The commission shall convene the first official meeting not later than January 10,
474 2014. The commission shall file a preliminary report of the study with recommendations for
475 long-term capital not later than April 30, 2014 with the secretary of administration and finance
476 and the house and senate clerks, who shall forward the report to the house and senate committees
477 on ways and means, the house and senate committees on bonding, capital assets and state
478 expenditures and the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs.

479 SECTION 33. (a) Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, there shall
480 be a 2-year veterans court project pilot program and study administered in Norfolk county and
481 managed by a veterans court program director for the purpose of developing a model to
482 implement veterans courts across the commonwealth. The veterans court program director shall
483 be selected by the chief justice of the trial court and the secretary of the department of veterans'
484 services after a publically advertised request for applicants. The director shall be an employee of
485 the trial court.

486 (b) There shall be established a veteran court advisory board consisting of 8 members: the
487 attorney general of the commonwealth, or a designee; the secretary of veterans' services, or a
488 designee; the chief justice of the trial court, or a designee; the executive director of the
489 Massachusetts District Attorneys Association, or a designee; the commissioner of the department
490 of mental health, or a designee; the commissioner of the department of public health, or a
491 designee; a member of the community who has served or a family member of someone who has
492 served, designated by the secretary of veterans services; and the chief counsel of the committee
493 for public counsel services, or a designee.

494 (c) The veterans court program director shall meet quarterly with the veterans court
495 advisory board and together shall make recommendations to the chief justice of the trial court
496 and to the court administrator on the implementation of sections 20 and 21 of chapter 108 of the
497 acts of 2012. The veterans court program director shall have duties that include, but are not
498 limited to: (i) developing a detailed summary of data collected through the pilot program; (ii)
499 recommending best practices for implementing a veterans court; (iii) analyzing costs associated
500 with implementing veterans courts across the commonwealth; (iv) studying the efficacy of the
501 models used in the pilot program; and (v) coordinating with Mission Direct Vet to develop a
502 summary of the organization's findings and efficacy of Mission Direct Vet pilot programs.

503 (d) The chief justice of the trial court with the advice and consent of the veterans court
504 advisory board shall submit a detailed report of findings, recommendations and plans to expand
505 veterans courts throughout the commonwealth to the joint committee on veterans and federal
506 affairs, joint committee on the judiciary, joint committee on mental health and substance abuse
507 and house and senate committees on ways and means not later than 2 years after the date of hire
508 of the veterans court program director.

509 SECTION 34. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the highway
510 constituting the turnpike and Boston extension, as defined in section 1 of chapter 6C, shall be
511 designated and known as the Purple Heart Massachusetts Turnpike, for inclusion in the National
512 Purple Heart Trial, in recognition of the members of the armed forces of the United States who
513 are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy. The Massachusetts Department
514 of Transportation shall erect and maintain suitable markers bearing that designation in
515 compliance with the standards of the department.

516 SECTION 35. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the portion of
517 state highway route 44, that runs between United States highway route 3 in the town of Plymouth
518 in a westerly direction for a distance of 14.4 miles to interstate highway route 495 in the town of

519 Middleborough, shall be designated and known as the Gold Star Highway in recognition of the
520 brave men and women who died while actively serving in our nation's armed services. The
521 Massachusetts Department of Transportation shall erect and maintain suitable markers bearing
522 that designation in compliance with the standards of the department.

523 SECTION 36. (a) Veterans' benefits and services officers appointed before the effective
524 date of this act shall be trained and certified at the first training administered by the secretary of
525 veterans' services as required by section 3B of chapter 115 of the General Laws.

526 (b) The secretary of veterans' services shall adopt all necessary rules, regulations and
527 procedures in conjunction with the commission established by section 19 of chapter 108 of the
528 acts of 2012 to implement section 23 not later than 180 days after the effective date of this act.