



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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Representative Smola Supports Bill to Enhance Veterans Benefits in Massachusetts

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means), is backing legislation to enhance veterans benefits in Massachusetts. House Bill 4525, An Act relative to veterans’ benefits, rights, appreciation, validation and enforcement, also known as the BRAVE Act, passed the House of Representatives on a unanimous vote of 150-0 on May 23.

In addition to doubling state funding assistance for indigent veterans’ burial costs from \$2,000 to \$4,000, the bill provides for an increase in the property tax exemption available to veterans who perform volunteer work for their home community, raising the cap from \$1,000 to \$1,500. The bill also adjusts the residency requirement for veterans and surviving spouses to qualify for real estate tax exemptions, reducing the amount of time these individuals must reside in Massachusetts from five consecutive years to two consecutive years.

“I am proud that the House was able to pass legislation that aims to improve the lives of Veterans in Massachusetts before Memorial Day,” said Representative Smola. “This legislation sends a message to our heroes and their families that we appreciate their bravery, sacrifice and service.”

An additional provision contained in the BRAVE Act gives cities and towns the option to adjust veterans property tax abatements on an annual basis. The amount of the increase would not be able to exceed the cost of living increase for that year, as calculated by the Consumer Price Index.

The BRAVE Act also:

- updates the current military campaign eligibility for the Welcome Home Bonus, and authorizes the family of a deceased service member to receive the \$1,000 stipend;
- adds Prisoners of War (POWs) to the list of veterans eligible for a property tax abatement;
- allows municipalities to designate a spot for veterans parking at their city or town hall during normal business hours;
- requires employers to provide employees who are veterans with time off, with or without pay, to observe Veterans Day;
- establishes a special commission to study the cost and feasibility of exempting veterans from tuition and fees when attending a public university, with a report due by December 31, 2018;
- allows combat medics to use their military training and experience to receive EMT certification in the Commonwealth without having to repeat duplicative classes;
- requires the Department of Veterans Services to maintain and publish a list of law firms and organizations that provide pro bono legal representation for veterans;
- allows parents or surviving guardians of veterans who died in service to the country to receive a real estate credit on their property beginning on January 1, 2019;
- authorizes recipients of the Bronze Star to be eligible for Bronze Star License Plates through the Registry of Motor Vehicles; and
- allows qualifying individuals whose vehicles are owned by trusts, partnerships, or corporations to be eligible for Gold Star Family license plates.

The Senate previously approved its own version of the BRAVE Act on May 3. The House and Senate will now attempt to reconcile the differences between the two bills and reach agreement on a final bill that will be sent to Governor Charlie Baker for his signature. For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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