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House Passes Bill to Enhance Support for Veterans and their Families

Legislation will bolster Massachusetts' Standing as the National Leader in Caring for its Military Personnel

(BOSTON) – The Massachusetts House of Representatives recently passed veterans legislation with an emphasis on housing and long-term support.

The bill establishes the Office of State Veterans' Homes and Housing which will advise the Department of Veterans' Services and provide oversight for the Commonwealth's two soldiers' homes in Chelsea and Holyoke. It creates an Executive Director position to head the new office. The Executive Director will focus on long-term care and will be responsible for the coordinated implementation and enforcement of laws, regulations and policies.

"I am immensely proud and humbled that Massachusetts ranks first in the nation when it comes to military-benefit programs and services," **House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo (D-Winthrop)** said. "It's so important that we provide comprehensive services for military personnel both while they are on active duty and when they return home. The House recognizes the unique contributions that veterans can make to the economy and the fabric of our society and we want to support that in every way possible"

"This legislation builds on the strong reputation that Massachusetts has as a national leader in the benefits and services we provide to our veterans," said **Representative Brian S. Dempsey (D-Haverhill), Chair of the Committee on Ways & Means**. "We thank these brave men and women and their families for their service and their sacrifice, and with the passage of this bill today, reaffirm our commitment to ensure that they receive highest level of care, services and opportunity across our Commonwealth."

"There is no question that Massachusetts is number one in terms of providing services to our veterans," said **Representative Jerry Parisella (D-Beverly), Chair of the Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs**. "Although we do so much for our veterans, it is important that we continue to improve the lives of those who have so gallantly served their country."

"I am proud to join the entire the House of Representatives in unanimously passing this bill which will protect the Commonwealth's veterans against employment discrimination, provide more public housing opportunities, and alleviate the burden of local tax obligations," said **Representative Stephen Kulik (D-Worthington), Vice Chairman of the Committee on Ways & Means**. "The Commonwealth continues to raise the bar in providing benefits and services to veterans, military members and their families, and it is our responsibility to make sure we continue to support them whether they are home or abroad defending our nation."

Understanding the sacrifice that military personnel and their families make not only while on active duty, but also after returning home, the Massachusetts House has consistently provided a continuum of employment, health care, educational and housing support. Correspondingly, this bill increases access to housing authorities for disabled, elderly and potentially unemployable veterans through two provisions. It also updates existing law so that "Veterans Status" is a clearly protected employment category. Currently only active duty personnel are covered.

In addition:

- Currently only children of Vietnam Era prisoners of war (POWs) are eligible for the Public Service Scholarship. This legislation would extend eligibility to all children of POWs;
- To accurately reflect the realities of present-day military training, paid public-service leave would now apply to uniformed service officers under this legislation;
- Extends a total property tax-exemption to service-connected blind veterans who have a 100% disability rating;
- Fully abates any property taxes due by a surviving spouse following the death or MIA status of a soldier, sailor or member of the National Guard;
- Extends the Veterans' Long-term Care Commission and reworks the Post-Deployment Council, both of which were created through the 2014 VALOR Act and focus on housing and support services for veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life.

The bill now goes to the Senate for their consideration.