

SENATE No. 1876

SENATE, Wednesday, October 9, 2013.

The committee on Veteran and Federal Affairs to whom was referred the petitions (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1678) of Thomas M. McGee, Lori A. Ehrlich, Sal N. DiDomenico, Robert F. Fennell and other members of the General Court for legislation relative to Gold Star Family vanity registration plates; (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1733) of John Hart, Jr. for legislation to prohibiting certain disruptions at military funerals and other services; (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1740) of Mark C. Montigny for legislation relative to veteran charity fraud; (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1742) of Richard T. Moore, Michael O. Moore, John V. Fernandes, Karen E. Spilka and other members of the General Court for legislation to establish a service-disabled veteran-owned small business procurement program for state contracts and purchasing; (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1743) of Richard T. Moore for legislation relative to veterans agents; (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1747) of Michael F. Rush, Linda Campbell, Angelo J. Puppolo, Jr., Robert M. Koczera and other members of the General Court for legislation relative to the certification of veterans service officers and agents; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3177) of Carlo Basile and others for legislation to establish a program for assisting certain disabled veterans in making home modifications; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3182) of Michael A. Costello and Kathleen O'Connor Ives for legislation to include service men and women who died in service while in a designated combat area as qualifying for the Medal of Liberty; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3183) of James J. Dwyer and others for an investigation and study by a special commission (including members of the General Court) relative to creating a state office of veterans business assistance; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3189) of Stephen Kulik and others relative to establishing a special commission (including members of the General Court) to make an investigation and study of state and local services provided to veterans; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3192) of Harold P. Naughton, Jr. and Thomas J. Calter relative to the training and certification of veteran service agents; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3196) of Harold P. Naughton, Jr. and Thomas J. Calter that the State Purchasing Agent give preference to veteran owned small businesses when making certain purchases; (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3204) of Jerald A. Parisella and others relative to employment for members of the armed forces returning from active duty; and (accompanied by bill, House, No. 3621) of Jerald A. Parisella and others relative to employment for members of the armed forces returning from active duty,- reports, the accompanying bill entitled "An Act relative to veterans' allowances, labor, outreach, and recognition" (Senate, No. 1876).

[Estimated Cost: \$450,000]

For the committee,
Michael F. Rush.

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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:

1 SECTION 1. The sums set forth in this section, for the purposes set forth in this act and
2 subject to the conditions specified under this act, are hereby authorized for expenditure in fiscal
3 year 2014, subject to the provisions of law regulating the disbursement of public funds and
4 approval thereof.

JUDICIARY

Trial Court

7 0330-0300 For administration and transportation costs associated with the veterans
8 court project pilot program and study..... \$100,000.

SECTION 1A.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Department of Veterans' Services

12 XXXX-XXXX For costs associated with implementing the training and certification of
13 veterans' benefits and services officers..... \$350,000

14 SECTION 2. Section 2 of chapter 90, as appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, is hereby
15 amended by striking out the twenty-first paragraph in lines 478 through 494, inclusive, and
16 inserting in place thereof the following:- The registrar shall furnish without charge to owners of
17 private passenger motor vehicles who are Gold Star parents, children, siblings, grandchildren, or
18 spouses of members of the military, upon presentation of satisfactory evidence of such status as

19 determined by the registrar, distinctive registration plates that read "Gold Star Family" for one
20 private passenger motor vehicle owned and principally used by such persons or a distinctive
21 "Gold Star Family" emblem to be affixed to a registration plate for a motorcycle privately owned
22 and principally used by such persons. The registrar may issue a distinctive "Gold Star Family"
23 registration of up to 6 characters for one private passenger motor vehicle owned and principally
24 used by such persons.

25 SECTION 3. Subsection (a) of section 8E of chapter 12 of the General Laws, as
26 appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting, after the words "U.S.A.;"
27 in line 17, the following words:- Department of Massachusetts Marine Corps League

28 SECTION 4. Chapter 15A of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012 Official
29 Edition, is hereby amended at the end thereof by inserting a new section:-

30 Section 44. (a) As used in this chapter, the following words shall, unless the context
31 clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:-

32 "Active duty", full-time duty status in the active uniformed service of the United States,
33 including members of the National Guard and Reserve on active duty orders pursuant to 10
34 U.S.C. sections 1209 and 1211.

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

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

48 SECTION 5. Subsection (m) of section 8 of chapter 15E of the General Laws, as
49 appearing in the 2012 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting, after the word "military"
50 in line 86, the following words:- ", National Guard or Reserve"

51 SECTION 6. Section 67A of chapter 33 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
52 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting, after the word "action", in line 3, the
53 following:- or who died in service while in a designated combat area in the line of duty

54 SECTION 7. Section 5N of Chapter 59 of the General Laws is hereby amended by
55 striking out the first paragraph and inserting in place thereof the following:-

56 Section 5N. In any city or town which accepts this section, the board of selectmen of a
57 town, or in a municipality having a town council form of government, the town council or the
58 mayor, with the approval of the city council in a city, may establish a program to allow veterans,
59 as defined in clause Forty-third of section 7 of chapter 4, or a spouse of a veteran in the case
60 where the veteran is deceased or disabled, to volunteer to provide services to that city or town. In
61 exchange for such volunteer services, the city or town shall reduce the real property tax
62 obligations of that veteran on the veteran's tax bills and that reduction shall be in addition to any
63 exemption or abatement to which that person is otherwise entitled; provided, however, that
64 person shall not receive a rate of, or be credited with, more than the current minimum wage of
65 the commonwealth per hour for the services provided pursuant to that reduction; and provided
66 further, that the reduction of the real property tax bill shall not exceed \$1,000 in a given tax year.
67 It shall be the responsibility of the city or town to maintain a record for each taxpayer including,
68 but not limited to, the number of hours of service and the total amount by which the real property
69 tax has been reduced and to provide a copy of that record to the assessor in order that the actual
70 tax bill reflect the reduced rate. A copy of that record shall also be provided to the taxpayer prior
71 to the issuance of the actual tax bill. The cities and towns shall have the power to create local
72 rules and procedures for implementing this section in a way that is consistent with the intent of
73 this section. Nothing in this section shall be construed to permit the reduction of workforce or
74 otherwise replace existing staff.

75 SECTION 8. Section 19 of chapter 68 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
76 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting at the end thereof the following new section:-

77 Section 19A. Any person or charitable organization established for an advocacy,
78 benevolent, educational, humane, patriotic, philanthropic, scientific or social welfare purpose on
79 behalf of veterans or the military, which intends to solicit contributions from persons within the
80 commonwealth or have contributions solicited on its behalf by other charitable organizations,
81 shall, prior to any such solicitation, apply to be a qualified veterans' charitable organization on a
82 form issued by the division that shall include, but not be limited to: (1) the name of the
83 organization and the purpose for which it is organized; (2) the address of the organization and the
84 address of any offices in this commonwealth or, if the organization does not maintain an office,
85 the name and address of the person having custody of its financial records; (3) the charitable
86 purpose or purposes for which the contributions to be solicited shall be used. The secretary of the
87 department of veterans' services shall publish on the department's internet web site a list of
88 qualified veterans' charitable organizations who have complied with this section. The secretary
89 shall place any qualified veterans charitable organization on such a list for a period of three
90 years. Any person or organization applying for qualified veterans' charitable organization status
91 shall be exempt from any registration or renewal fee.

92 SECTION 8A. Section 28 of chapter 68 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
93 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting at the end thereof the following subsection:-

94 (f) No person or organization shall claim to be a representative of a veterans' charitable
95 organization with the intent to solicit contributions that benefit or profit any person or
96 organization other than the qualified veterans' charitable organization. Any person or
97 organization who knowingly violates this section, or who willfully or knowingly gives false or
98 incorrect information to the division in filing statements or reports required by subsection (b),
99 whether such report or statement is verified or not, may be fined not more than \$1,000 or by
100 imprisonment for not more than one year, or both.

101 SECTION 9. Section 2 of chapter 90 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
102 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the words "ORDER OF THE PURPLE
103 HEART RECIPIENT" in line 407, the following words:- and the words "COMBAT
104 WOUNDED"

105 SECTION 10. Section 2E of chapter 90 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
106 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after subsection (c) the following subsection:-

107 (d) The registrar shall furnish, upon application, to the owners of private passenger
108 motor vehicles distinctive registration plates which shall display on their face the words "Support
109 our Veterans", to honor men and women who have served in the United States Armed Forces.
110 There shall be a fee of not less than \$50 for such plates in addition to the established registration
111 fee for private passenger motor vehicles, which shall be payable at the time of registration of the
112 vehicle and at each renewal thereof. The portion of the total fee remaining after the deduction of
113 costs directly attributable to the issuance of such plates shall be deposited in a registry retained
114 revenue account. Of the remaining portion of such fee there shall be an application process
115 designed and administered by the secretary of the department of veterans' services to distribute
116 such funds once during each fiscal year for the purpose of administering grants to programs or
117 organizations that fund additional services or conduct research related to, but not inclusive of, the
118 following: (i) veterans' mental health and substance abuse; (ii) veterans' housing and
119 homelessness; (iii) veterans' health care; (iv) veterans' disability benefits, including but not
120 limited to benefits provided by Section 11 of this act; (vii) long-term care of veterans; (vii)
121 veteran employment and employment training; (ix) veterans' education; (x) Gold Star family
122 support; (xi) the Massachusetts War Memorial Commission. In order to expend funds from this
123 account, the secretary of the department of veterans' services shall appoint a three-member
124 funding authorization committee. The committee shall authorize expenditure of funds from this
125 special fund through an application process developed and administered by the committee. The
126 secretary shall be a member and act as the chairperson of the committee. One member of the
127 committee shall be a member of the Veterans' Advisory Council who shall be appointed by the
128 governor. One member of the committee shall be a veteran representative of the public with no
129 financial interest in funding programs and services, who shall be appointed by the governor. No

130 member of the legislature shall serve on the committee. Any entity awarded funds under this
131 section in any fiscal year shall not be available for funding for next two subsequent fiscal years.

132 SECTION 11. Section 1B of chapter 112 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012
133 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting at the end thereof the following subsection:-

134 (f) The director and each of the boards of registration and examination under the
135 supervision of the director shall waive the initial license application fee of a license or
136 certification pursuant to subsections (a) through (e), inclusive.

137 SECTION 12. Chapter 115 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012 Official
138 Edition, is hereby amended by inserting the following after section 3A:—

139 Section 3B. (a) The secretary of the department of veterans' services shall establish
140 standards and promulgate regulations for the mandatory training and certification of veterans'
141 benefits and services officers. Veterans' benefits and services officers shall be trained and
142 certified within six (6) months of appointment pursuant to section 3 of chapter 115. Veterans'
143 benefits and services officers appointed before the effective date of this act shall be trained and
144 certified at the first training administered by the secretary of the department of veterans'
145 services. Training shall be offered annually and shall be administered by the secretary of the
146 department of veterans' services and approved by the Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers
147 Association and Massachusetts Municipal Association.

148 The secretary shall formulate a certification test in conjunction with the Massachusetts
149 Veterans' Service Officers Association, which shall ensure the candidate possesses the core
150 knowledge to effectively serve veterans. The secretary shall make the test available at the
151 mandatory annual training and shall provide a reasonable schedule of make-up training and
152 testing. The certification test shall assess areas of knowledge including but not limited to the
153 following: the chapter 115 program; federal and local benefits, including employment, education,
154 health care, retirement and other veterans' benefits; alternative resources, including those
155 partially or wholly subsidized by the federal government, such as Medicaid, supplemental
156 security income and social security disability benefits, and federal pension and compensation
157 entitlements. At the request of any appointing authority, the secretary shall offer training and
158 testing to any person who works for or in conjunction with a certified veterans service officer or
159 agent. Upon petition to the secretary by the appointing authority, a person appointed as a
160 veterans' benefits and services officer may be exempted by the secretary from the requirements
161 of this section.

162 (b) A person who receives an appointment as a veterans' benefits and services officer or
163 who is currently employed as a veterans' benefits and services officer pursuant to section 3 of
164 chapter 115 shall be certified. To be certified as a veterans' benefits and services officer, the
165 candidate shall meet the following qualifications: (i) be appointed locally pursuant to section 3 of
166 chapter 115; (ii) attend a mandatory training within six (6) months of appointment, or if

167 employed as a veterans' benefits and services officer on the effective date of this act, attend a
168 mandatory training at the first training administered by the secretary of the department of
169 veterans' services; (iii) attend a mandatory training once every calendar year; (iv) take and pass
170 the test offered at each administered training once every three (3) years. The commonwealth of
171 Massachusetts shall consider candidates who complete the requirements in this section a certified
172 veterans' benefits and services officer.

173 As used in this section, the term "veterans' benefits and services officer" shall include:
174 (1) full-time and part-time veterans' agents under chapter 115 of the General Laws, chapter 471
175 of the acts of 1972, chapter 68 of the acts of 1984 and title 108 of the Code of Massachusetts
176 Regulations; (ii) full-time directors of veterans' services districts under said chapter 115 of the
177 General Laws, said chapter 471 of the acts of 1972, said chapter 68 of the acts of 1984 and title
178 108 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations; (iii) county veterans' agents under chapter 128 of
179 the acts of 1982; and (iv) the veterans' benefits and services commissioner in and for the city of
180 Boston under said chapter 115 of the General Laws.

181 (c) During the period of employment, a person holding a veterans' benefits and services
182 officer certificate pursuant to this section shall be under the direct supervision of the appointing
183 authority pursuant to section 3 of chapter 115. The appointing authority shall regularly evaluate
184 the performance of assigned duties by the veterans' benefits and services officer.

185 (d) Failure of a veterans' benefits and services officer to comply with this section shall
186 result in removal of the veterans' benefits and services officer by the appointing authority.
187 Failure of an appointing authority to remove the veterans' benefits and services officer and
188 comply with this section or any other provisions of chapter 115 of the General Laws, shall result
189 in reduction of the percentage of seventy-five per cent reimbursement allowance, paid by the
190 commonwealth pursuant to section 6 of chapter 115, to fifty per cent. The reduction shall remain
191 in effect for a time period designated by the secretary or until the appointing authority is in full
192 compliance.

193 (e) The secretary shall adopt all necessary rules, regulations, and procedures in
194 conjunction with the commission established by section 19 of chapter 108 of the acts of 2012 to
195 implement this act no later than 180 days following the passage of this act. To defray the costs of
196 administering this section, funds shall be appropriated to the department of veterans' services,
197 and shall be expended under the direction of the secretary.

198 SECTION 13. Chapter 272 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2012 Official
199 Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after section 42A the following new section:-

200 Section 42B. Whoever willfully pickets, loiters or otherwise creates a disturbance within
201 1,000 feet of a funeral home, church, temple, military funeral procession, burial or other building
202 where military funeral services are being held, shall be punished by a fine of not more than two

203 thousand dollars or by imprisonment for not more than two years in a house of correction, or
204 both.

205 SECTION 14. The secretary of the executive office of health and human services shall
206 establish and implement an ongoing veterans' home modification program through the
207 Massachusetts rehabilitation commission. The commissioner of the Massachusetts rehabilitation
208 commission, in collaboration with the secretary of the department of veterans' services, shall
209 promulgate rules and regulations necessary to carry out a veterans' home modifications program
210 for any veteran who was called to active duty after September 11, 2001 who has suffered a
211 service connected disability and who requires home modifications services to function more
212 independently in their homes and community. The purpose of the veterans' home modification
213 program is to provide funding on behalf of said veterans for home modifications services made
214 necessary by the functional limitations associated with the veteran's service connected disability.
215 The commissioner and secretary of veterans' services shall, to the best of their knowledge,
216 identify veterans eligible for this program and provide a cost estimate for the purpose of
217 appropriations for this program for fiscal year 2015 and beyond. Said cost estimate shall be
218 reported to the House and Senate Committee on Ways and Means and Joint Committee on
219 Veterans and Federal Affairs not later than March 1, 2014.

220 SECTION 15. (a) There is hereby established the Massachusetts Servicemember Post-
221 Deployment Council to make recommendations regarding the implementation of a program in
222 Massachusetts to support service members transitioning to civilian life after deployment.

223 (b) The council shall consist of 25 members: 2 members of the senate appointed by the
224 president of the senate, 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on veterans and
225 federal affairs and 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on mental health and
226 substance abuse; 1 member of the senate appointed by the minority leader of the senate, who
227 shall be a member of the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, the
228 joint committee on labor and workforce development, or the joint committee on housing; 2
229 members of the house of representatives appointed by the speaker of the house of
230 representatives, 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on veterans and federal
231 affairs and 1 of whom shall be a member of the joint committee on mental health and substance
232 abuse; 1 member of the house of representatives appointed by the minority leader of the house
233 of representatives, who shall be a member of the joint committee on children, families and
234 persons with disabilities, the joint committee on labor and workforce development, or the joint
235 committee on housing; 1 member shall be the secretary of health and human services, or a
236 designee from the executive staff to include representation from the Department of Public
237 Health, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Children and Families, and the
238 Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission; 1 member shall be the secretary of veterans'
239 services, or a designee; 1 member shall be the adjutant general of the national guard, or a
240 designee; 1 member shall be the commissioner of the Massachusetts rehabilitation commission,
241 or a designee; 1 member shall be the undersecretary of the department of housing and

242 community development, or a designee; 1 member shall be the secretary of the executive office
243 of labor and workforce development, or a designee; 1 member shall be the secretary of the
244 executive office of education, or a designee; 13 members shall be appointed by the governor, 2
245 of whom shall be veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom, and 1
246 each from a list of nominees submitted by each of the following organizations: Massachusetts
247 Coalition for Suicide Prevention, Massachusetts Psychological Association, Massachusetts
248 Psychiatric Association, Massachusetts Association of Mental Health, Massachusetts Association
249 for Behavioral Healthcare, Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association,
250 Massachusetts Women Veterans Network, MGH/The Red Sox Foundation's Homebase
251 Program, the Massachusetts Military Heroes Fund, the federal Veterans Administration (VA),
252 the Massachusetts Hospital Association, and the Massachusetts League of Community Health
253 Centers.

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

259 (d) The council shall perform and make recommendations pertaining to how best
260 operationalize and quantify the following duties, including but not limited to: (1) examine and
261 evaluate the effectiveness of veterans' suicide prevention policies in the commonwealth; (2)
262 examine and evaluate the effectiveness of suicide prevention training for veterans' personnel in
263 the commonwealth; (3) develop recommendations on ways in which veterans may be screened
264 upon return from deployment; (4) develop recommendations for methods by which the
265 commonwealth may identify, evaluate, and refer servicemembers returning to civilian life post-
266 deployment for assistance with education, employment, healthcare, housing, and other services;
267 (5) provide recommendations for improving communication between mental health services and
268 potentially at-risk veterans; (6) provide recommendations for improving observation and
269 treatment plans for returning veterans; (7) develop recommendations for the provision of mental
270 health counseling services to combat the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder for post-
271 deployment veterans (8) examine ways in which the commonwealth can reduce stress, anxiety,
272 and depression among returning veterans; (9) identify the needs of women veterans relative to
273 issues including, but not limited to, compensation, rehabilitation, outreach, health care,
274 education, and other issues facing women veterans in the community. The council may hold
275 public hearings to assist in the collection and evaluation of data and testimony.

276 (e) The council shall submit its findings and recommendations, including a detailed re-
277 entry program plan relative to servicemembers who return to civilian life after deployment,
278 together with recommendations for legislation to carry those recommendations into effect by
279 filing the same with the clerks of the house of representatives and senate, the house and senate

280 committees on ways and means, the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, and the joint
281 committee on mental health and substance abuse not later than September 15, 2015.

282 SECTION 15A. (a) The Department of Public Health shall issue guidance to acute
283 hospitals and ambulance service providers in order to establish the systematic identification of
284 veterans and military service members following clinical care to effect appropriate referrals
285 consistent with the privacy protections offered by federal and state laws and regulations to the
286 Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and to enable and promote access to all
287 available resources, supports and benefits.

288 (b) The Department of Veterans' Services shall submit aggregate data reports on all
289 referrals quarterly to the Department of Public Health.

290 SECTION 16. (a) There is hereby established a special commission to study and make
291 recommendations to create a state office of veterans' employment and business assistance with a
292 goal of expanding business and employment opportunities for veterans.

293 (b) The commission shall consist of 16 members: 3 members of the house of
294 representatives, 2 of whom shall be appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives and
295 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader of the house of representatives; 3 members
296 of the senate, 2 of whom shall be appointed by the president of the senate and 1 of whom shall be
297 appointed by the minority leader of the senate; the secretary of labor and workforce
298 development, or a designee; the secretary of the department of veterans' services, or a designee;
299 the secretary of housing and economic development, or a designee; and 6 members appointed by
300 the governor, which shall consist of 1 member from each of the following organizations:
301 Veterans Business Council, Northeast Veteran Resource Center, Inc., Massachusetts Small
302 Business Development Center, Massachusetts Veteran Business Development, Center for
303 Women and Enterprise, and Veterans, Inc. The speaker of the house of representatives and the
304 president of the senate shall appoint 2 members of the commission as co-chairpersons.

305 (c) The commission shall: (1) examine and report on barriers to employment facing
306 returning veterans; (2) examine barriers to starting a veteran-owned business or nonprofits; (3)
307 identify opportunities to promote the development of business enterprises and non-profit
308 organizations owned and operated by veterans; (4) examine relationships that can be enhanced
309 between state agencies and private sector employers to promote private sector awareness of
310 barriers to veteran employment and potential benefits of hiring veterans; (5) study the feasibility
311 of state-level veteran career counseling and training options, to include coordination with one-
312 stop career centers and all outreach programs and initiatives relative to veterans' employment
313 services in the commonwealth; (5) identify opportunities to maximize revenues aimed at
314 accomplishing the goals in this section, including but not limited to the availability of federal
315 grants and matching funds.

316 Said examination shall include, but not be limited to: a report on the number of veterans
317 residing in each Massachusetts municipality; a report on the number of veterans actively seeking
318 employment services in each community; coordinating with local, state, and federal entities to
319 estimate the number of veterans in each community currently unemployed or under-employed;
320 and determining the geographic location of each local veteran employment representative
321 assigned to career centers or other employment outreach locations throughout Massachusetts.
322 This examination shall include an assessment of staffing levels, funding levels, and outreach
323 efforts performed by local veteran employment representatives as well as a projection of
324 underserved geographic locations in need of greater veteran outreach efforts.

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

328 (e) The commission shall report to the general court the results of its investigation and
329 study, and recommendations together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry its
330 recommendations into effect by filing the same with the clerks of the senate and the house of
331 representatives on or before January 15, 2015.

332 SECTION 17. (a) There shall be a special commission to study and make
333 recommendations pursuant to chapter 115 of the General Laws. The commission shall study and
334 evaluate current laws, regulations, and practices related to providing services and support to
335 veterans and make recommendations to improve the quality, effectiveness, and efficiency of
336 partnerships between federal, state and local programs.

337 (b) The committee shall consist of 7 members: 1 member of the senate, who shall be the
338 chair of the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, or a designee, who shall serve as co-
339 chair of the commission; 1 member of the house of representatives, who shall be the chair of the
340 joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, or a designee, who shall serve as co-chair of the
341 commission; the secretary of the department of veterans' services, or a designee; the secretary of
342 the executive office of administration and finance, or a designee; the president of the
343 Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association, or a designee; the executive director of
344 the Massachusetts Municipal Association, or a designee; the veterans' benefits and services
345 commissioner in and for the city of Boston, or a designee.

346 (c) The commission shall: (1) study and evaluate the current system for identifying
347 veterans in need of services; (2) study the current state-level process of providing, administering,
348 and financing services and access to services; (3) make recommendations to enhance the
349 coordination of the actions of federal, state, and local government agencies to support
350 measurably better outcomes and efficiency for community-based veterans services. The
351 commission shall evaluate the fiscal impact on local government of the current system of
352 municipal financing of veterans' benefits subject to reimbursement through state appropriations

353 and of the rules governing state and local administration of chapter 115 of the General Laws.
354 The Commission shall consider alternative efficient methods of financing and administration that
355 would improve services to veterans.

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

360 SECTION 18. (a) There is hereby established the Massachusetts Veterans Long Term
361 Care and Housing Master Plan Commission. The commission shall study, evaluate and make
362 recommendations regarding the future needs surrounding housing and residential care demand
363 for veterans, spouses, and dependents in the commonwealth.

364 (b) The commission shall consist of 15 members: 1 member of the senate who shall be
365 the chair of the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, or a designee, who shall serve as
366 co-chair of the commission; 1 member of the house of representatives who shall be the chair of
367 the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs, or a designee, who shall serve as co-chair of
368 the commission; the secretary of the department of veterans' services, or a designee; 4 members
369 appointed by the secretary of health and human services, 1 who shall be an expert in healthcare
370 delivery systems, 1 who shall be an expert in healthcare facilities management, 1 who shall be a
371 member of the board of trustees of the Soldiers' Home in Massachusetts, and 1 who shall be a
372 member of the board of trustees of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke; 1 member appointed by the
373 secretary of administration and finance from the division of capital asset management and
374 maintenance; the president of the Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association, or a
375 designee; the executive director of the interagency council on housing and homelessness or a
376 designee; 1 member, acting as a private citizen not employed by an agency, city, town, or group
377 providing services to veterans, that has extensive knowledge of the Veterans Administration
378 appointed by the secretary of the department of veterans' services; 1 member, acting as a private
379 citizen not employed by an agency, city, town, or group providing services to veterans with
380 extensive knowledge of real estate, construction and development appointed by the secretary of
381 the executive office of administration and finance; 2 members from the governor's advisory
382 committee on women veterans; 2 members, acting as private citizens not employed by a city,
383 town, or group providing services to veterans, appointed by the secretary of the department of
384 veterans' services, that are combat veterans of conflicts since 2001.

385 (c) The commission shall study and evaluate the emerging changes in veterans care and
386 delivery of services relative to long term health care and housing with the goal of ensuring all
387 services provided by the state are strategically balanced by region, and are in-line and
388 complimentary to those services provided by the federal government and other service providers.
389 The commission shall study and evaluate the current capital needs for both the Soldiers' Home in
390 Massachusetts and the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke and examine best practices in other states for

391 the purpose of developing a long term master plan and recommendations relative to long term
392 capital spending.

393 (d) The commission shall convene the first official meeting on or before January 10,
394 2014. The commission shall file a preliminary report of the study with recommendations for
395 long term capital not later than April 30, 2014 with the secretary of the executive office of
396 administration and finance, the clerks of the house of representatives and senate who shall
397 forward the same to the house and senate committees on ways and means, the house and senate
398 committees on bonding, capital assets and state expenditures, and the joint committee on
399 veterans and federal affairs.

400 SECTION 19. Notwithstanding any provision of federal, state or local law to the
401 contrary, a private, nonpublic employer of the Commonwealth may provide a preference to a
402 veteran for employment. The spouse of an honorably discharged veteran who is determined to
403 be 100 per cent disabled by the Veterans' Administration as a result of enemy action or an
404 accident certified by said Veterans' Administration to be service-connected may also be
405 preferred for employment. This preference is not considered in violation of any federal, state, or
406 local equal employment opportunity law.

407 SECTION 20. (a) Notwithstanding the provisions of any general or special law to the
408 contrary, there shall be a two-year veterans court project pilot program and study administered in
409 Norfolk County and managed by a veterans court program director for the purpose of developing
410 a model to implement veterans courts across the commonwealth. The veterans court program
411 director shall be selected by the Chief Justice of the Trial Court and the secretary of the
412 department of veterans' services after a publically advertised request for applicants and shall be
413 employed by the Executive Office of the Trial Court.

414 (b) There shall be established a veteran court advisory board consisting of 8 members: the
415 attorney general of the commonwealth, or a designee; the secretary of veterans services, or a
416 designee; the chief justice of the trial court, or a designee; the executive director of the
417 Massachusetts District Attorneys Association, or a designee; the commissioner of the department
418 of mental health, or a designee; the commissioner of the department of public health, or a
419 designee; a member of the community who has served or a family member of someone who has
420 served, designated by the secretary of veterans services and a member of the committee for
421 public counsel services, designated by the chief justice of the trial court.

422 (c) The veterans court program director shall meet quarterly with the veterans court
423 advisory board and together shall make recommendations to the Chief Justice of the Trial Court
424 and to the Court Administrator on the implementation of sections 20 and 21 of chapter 108 of the
425 acts of 2012. The veterans court program director shall have duties that include, but are not
426 limited to, the following: (i) developing a detailed summary of data collected through the pilot
427 program; (ii) recommending best practices for implementing a veterans court; (iii) analyzing

428 costs associated with implementing veterans courts across the commonwealth; (iv) studying the
429 efficacy of the models used in the pilot program; (v) coordinating with Mission Direct Vet to
430 develop a summary of the organization's findings and efficacy of Mission Direct Vet pilot
431 programs.

432 (d) The Chief Justice of the Trial Court with the advice and consent of the veterans court
433 advisory board shall submit a detailed report of findings, recommendations, and plan to expand
434 veterans courts throughout the commonwealth to the joint committee on veterans and federal
435 affairs, joint committee on the judiciary, joint committee on mental health and substance abuse,
436 house committee on ways and means, and senate committee on ways and means not later than
437 two years after the date of hire of the veterans court program director.

438 (e) To defray costs of administering this section, funds shall be appropriated to the
439 executive office of the trial court and shall be expended under the direction of the chief justice.