

OFFICE OF THE VETERAN ADVOCATE

ANNUAL REPORT

Fiscal Year 2026



September 2026

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Bob Notch, Veteran Advocate



In June of 2026, the Office of the Veteran Advocate was honored to receive the *2026 Outside Award* from the Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association (MVSOA).

It is our privilege and responsibility to work alongside municipal Veterans' Service Officers (VSOs) across Massachusetts to provide the best possible support to veterans and their families.

The MVSOA Outside Award is a recognition given to external partners, agencies, or advocates who are not municipal VSOs. It honors collaborative work, outstanding support, and contributions made toward advancing services and assistance for the state's veteran community.

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This report meets the requirements of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 115B, Section 4.

The veteran advocate shall report annually to the governor, the senate president, the speaker of the house of representatives, the senate and the house committees on ways and means, and the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs on the activities of the office, including, but not limited to, an analysis of the delivery of services to veterans and recommendations for changes in agency procedures which would enable the commonwealth to better provide services to and for veterans and their families and priorities for implementation of those changes to services. This report shall be made public on the website of the veteran advocate.

Executive Summary

This annual report of the Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) for Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) is hereby presented to the Governor, Senate President, Speaker of the House of Representatives, State Legislators, and the citizens of Massachusetts. This document outlines an overview of Massachusetts' veteran population, a summary of OVA actions in FY26, and a brief analysis of areas to improve programs, benefits and services for veterans and their families.



The Office of the Veteran Advocate

The OVA was established under Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022, underscoring its commitment to ensuring that every veteran receives the highest standard of care, access to comprehensive benefits and services, and the respect and dignity they have earned. We developed our vision and mission through thoughtful and deliberate consideration of the broad responsibilities specified in this enabling statute.

A year-end snapshot of the OVA includes:

- As of July 1, 2026, the OVA completed its first full year with core staff of twelve full-time positions (with one vacancy) organized into six divisions capable of minimally meeting all its statutory requirements.
- Fiscal Year 2027 funding was reduced to \$1M from \$2M in FY26 and FY25. This reduction negatively impacts the OVA's ability to meet its statutory responsibilities in support of veterans and their families. OVA is pursuing a supplemental budget request to reach its FY26 level.



Massachusetts' Veteran Population

Data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics estimated a **2025 population of 255,345 veterans in Massachusetts** (a net loss of over 9,000 from 2024), with most veterans over 65 years of age.

Comparing veteran and non-veteran populations by two specific age groups provides the following workforce insights:

- Individuals with low engagement in the workforce (65+ years of age) - veterans are 9% of this age group's total population.
- Individuals with high engagement in the workforce (18-64 years of age) - veterans are 2% of this age group's total population.

OVA continues to work with state partners to identify the number of veterans who are housed by the state. The current estimate, with some agencies not reporting, is approximately 759.

Policy makers should be mindful of the statewide and local impact as the Massachusetts veteran population continues to decline.



Actions of the Office in Fiscal Year 2026

The OVA conducted numerous activities within its mandate of supporting veterans and their families. Key activities listed include support to municipal Veteran Service Officers and state agencies, other community outreach activities, fatality investigations, and veteran safety cases.



Issue Analysis and Recommendations

Analysis of strategic issues raised by research, community engagement, and partner discussions continue to reveal several key areas that warrant attention:

- A Declining Veteran Population. The VA estimates that Massachusetts sustains a net loss of approximately 9,000 veterans per year. This decline can impact the state in many ways, from local civic support to the workforce. The OVA can assist state leaders and agencies in strategizing how to attract and retain transitioning service members and veterans.
- Continue the Initiative to Update the MA Definitions of Veteran. The HERO Act amended the definition of veteran in MGL c. 115, aligning it with federal language, but it still leaves gaps in eligibility for some veteran programs under other chapters of Massachusetts General Laws. Numerous state veteran benefits and services fall under the primary definition of "veteran" stated in MGL c. 4, which remains unchanged. The OVA supports legislation, HB3871 and SB2467, updating the basic definition of a veteran in Chapter 4 to resolve these inconsistencies.
- Support to Uniformed Service Members and Their Families. Massachusetts lacks a single agency responsible for overseeing programs and services for active service members and their families, as well as facilitating their transition from service member to veteran. Various agencies have limited responsibilities, but no centralized oversight of support exists for military families in the state. The OVA recommends expanding a state agency authority to include support for service members and their families.
- Justice Involved Veterans. Veterans incarcerated in Massachusetts may face difficulties accessing physical exams necessary to complete their VA benefits claims. The OVA is taking steps with county jails and the Massachusetts Department of Corrections (DOC) to find initial ways to solve this problem. These efforts are expected to shift a portion of the costs associated with reentry and transitional services from the Commonwealth to the federal government.

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA)



OVA Vision

Every veteran in the Commonwealth receives the highest standard of care, enjoys the full spectrum of available benefits, and is treated with unwavering respect and dignity.

OVA Mission

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) safeguards the well-being, dignified treatment, rights and benefits of veterans in the care of, or receiving services from the Commonwealth; ensuring these veterans and their families receive compassionate, timely, safe and effective services.

OVA collaborates to facilitate access to federal and state benefits and conducts thorough investigations to enhance care and services provided to veterans.

Origins of the OVA

The position of Veteran Advocate and the independent Office of the Veteran Advocate in Chapter 115B of Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) were established by Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022, *AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE GOVERNANCE, STRUCTURE AND CARE OF VETERANS AT THE COMMONWEALTH'S VETERANS' HOMES*. The OVA is charged with multiple responsibilities along with reporting requirements to the governor, legislative leaders and the public. See Appendix B for the list of statutory responsibilities.

Understanding the OVA

Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) marks the first full fiscal year of mission capability for the OVA. While the office is considered fully established, it has limited capacity to handle several issues simultaneously and must be selective in its workplan and projects.

The OVA's broad responsibilities extend from the strategic level of the veteran ecosystem down to direct coordination with municipal Veterans Service Officers¹. The OVA serves as an agency-to-agency collaborator and advisor, focused on leading or inspiring changes to improve the lives of veterans and their families in Massachusetts.

The OVA uses peer-reviewed research, relevant data, best practices, recurring observations, and the review of laws, regulations, and established policies to evaluate issues and provide

¹ Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 115 and 115B identify several names for municipal appointees that act to disburse veteran benefits, including veterans' agents, veterans' benefits and services officers, veterans service officers, Directors of Veterans' Services Districts, and the Boston Commissioner for veterans' benefits and services. We use the term veterans service officer to align with common usage.

trusted recommendations to state leadership and the public on how the Commonwealth may improve its veteran-related programs, benefits, and services.

In the event of a fatality or serious injury to a veteran in the care of the Commonwealth, the OVA conducts investigations and makes recommendations to the parties involved. The focus is to provide recommendations for improvement and assist with implementing corrective actions to prevent further issues for veterans and their families. It is the goal of the Veteran Advocate to build proactive policies, information-sharing procedures and relationships with executive agencies that support prevention of avoidable serious injuries or deaths.

In short, the OVA adds value to the veteran support system in Massachusetts by providing independent viewpoints and actions to help improve government support to veterans and their families.

Office of the Veteran Advocate Staffing²

OVA Staff as of June 30, 2026

Bob Notch – Veteran Advocate	Scott Pitta – Chief of Staff
Danielle Dupont – Financial & Administrative Officer	Cliff Coy – Northeast Region Liaison
Nathan Dufault – Veteran Safety Advisor / Investigator	Truc DeCoste – Southeast Region Liaison
vacant – Policy and Research Officer	Christian DiLuzio – West Region Liaison
Anthony Langone Jr. – Communications Officer	Paul Furbush – Central Region Liaison
Eve Elliott – General Counsel	Casandra Sullivan – Legal Intern*
Elliott Pawlak – Business Intelligence Officer	Melaku Mohammed – Data Analyst*

*Indicates part-time employees or unpaid interns

The general appropriation for the OVA in FY26 was \$2M, aligned with OVA’s goals to fully meet its statutory requirements. During the year, the OVA proposed a FY27 budget of \$2.127M³ to meet annual cost increases and slightly build capacity to manage the growing demands. Budget proposals from the House and Senate did not align, and after a Conference Committee agreement, the General Court approved an appropriation of \$1M for FY27. This 50% cut in funding requires the OVA to pause significant initiatives and develop options to reduce capabilities to remain within budget limits. The OVA is pursuing a supplemental budget request to bring the office to at least the \$2M received in FY25 and FY26. If a supplemental budget does

² The OVA is organized into six divisions: Administration, Communications, Data and Information, Liaison, Policy and Research, and Veteran Safety/Investigations.

³ “OVA FY2027 Budget Request (3/18/2026)” can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/public-documents>.

not cover the funding gap, the ability of the OVA to meet its statutory responsibility of serving veterans and their families may be severely limited.

Massachusetts' Veteran Population

The OVA believes that maintaining an understanding of the veteran picture in Massachusetts is necessary to assist with near and far-term strategic recommendations to improve programs, benefits and services. In each annual report we include current and future estimates of the veteran population to maintain a common frame of reference. The OVA uses VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (NCVAS)⁴ data as its standard.

255,345

Veterans in Massachusetts

22,669 (8.9%)

Female Veterans

232,676 (91.1%)

Male Veterans

134,172 (52.5%)

Veterans over the age of 65



MA⁵ & MA Veteran Population⁶ 2025

Key Observations

With a decline of over 9,000 veterans from the 2024 estimate, veterans represent approximately 3.6% of the 2025 total population of Massachusetts.

Women who served. While the number decreased slightly from 2024, the proportion increased to nearly 9% of the total state veteran population.

Over half of veterans in Massachusetts are also eligible for aging adult services.

⁴ National Center for Veterans Statistics and Analysis (NCVAS) website, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/>.

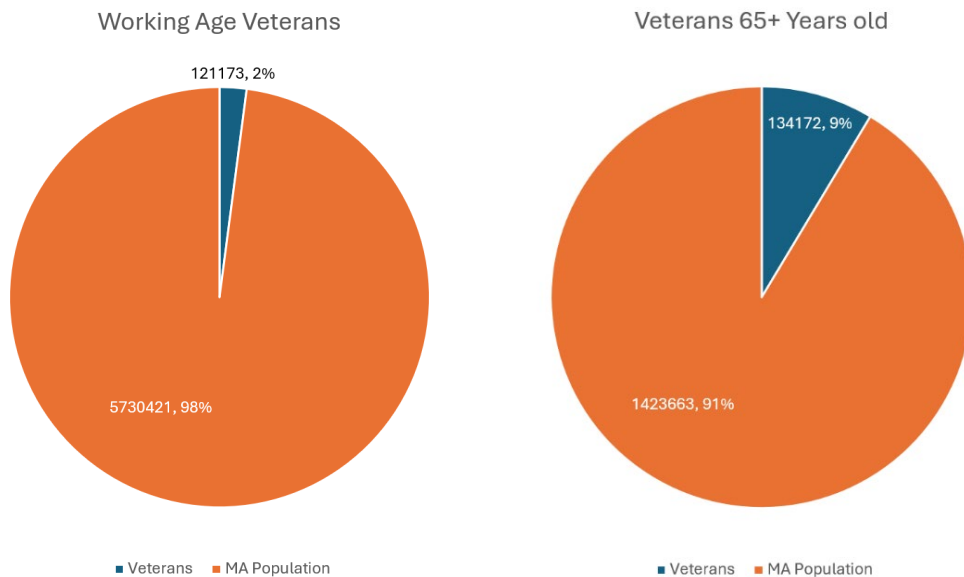
⁵ US Census Bureau, QuickFacts, Massachusetts: July 1, 2025 (V2025), <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MA/AGE775225#AGE775225>.

⁶ NCVAS, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/>. This veteran number is a larger, more inclusive federal definition of veteran.

Veterans in the Workforce

Another view of the veteran population is to consider age demographics as it pertains to veterans in Massachusetts' workforce. The Department of Economic Research within Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development published a dashboard to view this portion of the veteran population.⁷ Using this same basic analysis with the 2025 NCVAS and US Census Bureau data from the preceding section, we can highlight the significant differences between the veteran and civilian populations below and above the age of 65.

While anyone, including veterans, can continue to work without an age limit, people 65 and over make up a high percentage of veterans, yet have low engagement within the labor force. Focusing on working-age adults between 18-64 years old allows for a more accurate representation of the employment circumstances for veterans residing in the Commonwealth.



Key Observations

Veterans are 2% of the estimated working-age population in Massachusetts. With active recruiting and increased incentives, there's an opportunity to increase working-age veterans contributing to Massachusetts' economic development.

Veterans make up 9% of the state population 65 and older. All are eligible for aging adult/elder services and protections that begin at age 60.

Analysis uses the federal definition of a veteran, normally a larger, more inclusive count than several state definitions.

⁷ Veterans Equity Dashboard, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/veterans-equity-dashboard>. This uses data for 2024.

Veterans in the Care of the Commonwealth

A critical portion of the veteran population are those who are housed by state agencies. For the OVA, these groups of veterans “in the care” of the Commonwealth are of interest regarding their care and treatment along with direct advocacy responsibility. These state facilities include - Veterans Homes at Holyoke and Chelsea (including veterans in residential living), three state hospitals, 16 correctional institutions, 15 county jails, behavioral health treatment facilities, and several substance abuse treatment programs. While the OVA statute includes some private entities⁸ in its responsibilities, the OVA has limited access to their veteran counts. This table shows a June 2026 count of reported “in-residence” veterans across agencies.

Public Facility Type ⁹	Veterans
State Correctional Facilities	354
County Jails	57 ¹⁰
State Hospitals	No Report
Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs	No Report
Chelsea Veterans Home	231 ¹¹
Holyoke Veterans Home	117
TOTAL	759

Future Considerations

Both the US Census Bureau and the NCVAS future estimates of the veteran population in Massachusetts predict an unending decline of veterans residing in the state – roughly 9,000 per year. It is important to consider how this decline may impact Massachusetts’ labor force; the amount of federal dollars entering the state linked to veteran programs, benefits, and services; and the demand for state funded housing, benefits, and services.

At the local level, we should consider how this decline may impact civic support and volunteer efforts provided by veterans. Veteran Service Organizations play a key role in planning, preparing, and participating in local commemoration and remembrance events such Memorial Day, Veterans Day, memorial dedications, and others. These groups also provide scholarships for graduating seniors and provide access to youth development and leadership programs.

Policymakers should be aware of this reduction of veterans who call Massachusetts “home.”

If appropriately funded, the OVA plans to implement secure data sharing across state and municipal agencies to generate more accurate and geographically precise insights on veterans.

⁸ The OVA considers state grant, contract, or earmark funding recipients, who receive funding through state executive offices, as the private or constituent agencies specified in MGL Chapter 115B.

⁹ These facilities have fluctuating veteran populations.

¹⁰ This count does not include six counties – Berkshire, Bristol, Essex, Franklin, Middlesex, Plymouth and Suffolk. Nantucket County does not operate an active local jail or correctional facility. OVA is pursuing additional jail data.

¹¹ This count includes the Chelsea Veterans Home (121) and the domiciliary (110).

Actions of the Office in Fiscal Year 2026

During FY26, the OVA accomplished numerous mission related activities. This section provides a short synopsis of the key actions.

- Completed 71 of 124 engagements in response to inquiries from veterans, family members, and veteran service providers. OVA continues its work to close the remaining 53 inquiries and respond to new ones.
- **“Operation Recognition”**. Assisted East Bridgewater and Boston in providing a Vietnam-era Veteran his high school diploma nearly 60 years from his proposed graduation date. The recognized veteran was unable to graduate with his class due to military enlistment.¹² <https://www.cbsnews.com/boston/news/vietnam-veteran-boston-high-school-diploma-william-driscoll/>
- Assisted the town of Lakeview in easing the burden of transferring a surviving spouse tax abatement to her new residence. OVA conducted research and provided the town with current Department of Revenue guidance that simplified the administrative process. This guidance was subsequently distributed to all municipal VSOs.
- Conducted multiple information sessions with various audiences sharing how the OVA can assist their work and collaboratively improve the programs, benefits and services for veterans:
 - Three State House information sessions;
 - Information booth at Mass Municipal Association’s *Connect 351* conference;
 - Virtual Town Hall with municipal VSOs from across the state;
 - Multiple local media appearances.
- Hosted a first-annual open house that facilitated individual connections and networking between federal, state, and local agency staff to discuss veteran related issues.
- Improved the OVA social media messaging to focus on sharing valuable information regarding events, benefits and services available to veterans and their families. OVAs reach expanded by 65%. OVA’s goal is to increase awareness of the benefits and services available to veterans and their families.
- Extended an OVA-funded mental wellness pilot program providing municipal VSOs 24/7 access to a telehealth platform. The platform allows users to remain anonymous during group sessions and provides unlimited access to wellness tools. This addressed a long-standing VSO request regarding case fatigue and occupational stress.

¹² Chapter 130 of the Acts of 2005 are codified in MGL Chapter 71, Section 4.

- Published “Understanding Massachusetts’ Municipal Veterans Service Officer” as an overview of VSO responsibilities and work environments; establishing a foundation to open dialogue regarding ways to improve access to this vital resource.
- Led efforts to revive the Central Mass Veterans Coalition, building stronger connections between local VSOs and community-based organizations focused on organizing federal, state and local resources supporting veterans.
- Completed 51 of 56 reported veteran safety cases and fatality investigations.
 - Of the 38 veteran safety cases, 31 assisted the Commission for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities (CPPD)¹³ and 7 assisted other agencies.
 - The OVA completed 18 fatality investigations.¹⁴
- **Gabriel House Assisted Living Facility Fire in Fall River on July 13, 2025.** OVA involvement was driven by concerns regarding a disproportionate number of veteran fatalities in the fire and an inquiry from the US Department of Veterans Affairs.
 - Four of the ten fatalities were veterans – four times the age population rate.
 - After preliminary inquiry, OVA determined that the facility did not receive federal or state veteran support and did not fall within agency investigative authority. OVA then offered expert staff assistance to state and local agencies.
 - The OVA Southeast Regional Liaison assisted the Fall River Veterans Services Officer in assisting displaced veterans and families of the deceased veterans through emotional support, information sharing, and providing supplies and resources.
- Assisted MassHealth in navigating and understanding veteran disability ratings and helped craft specific language related to federal healthcare eligibility for veterans with permanent and total disability.
- Supported the New England Veteran Business Owners Outreach Center (VBOC) by serving as a site host for a Boots to Business event for veteran business owners.
- Offered editing and research assistance and provided recommendations to the Secretary of State’s office for updating the Veterans’ Laws and Benefits Guide.
- Participant and catalyst with DPH and other state agency Veteran Employee Support Groups to promote information sharing and understanding of veteran benefits and services to veterans and family members employed by the Commonwealth.

¹³ Effective June 12, 2026, the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC) was renamed the Commission for the Protection of Persons with Disabilities (CPPD).

¹⁴ OVA estimates that the number of veteran fatalities connected to agencies that provide services to veterans is higher than reported. We continue to work with these agencies on reporting requests.

- Developed a partnership with the Executive Office of Technical Services and Support (EOTSS) to build and improve data and information sharing and management.
 - Established an OVA Data and Information Systems division;
 - Signed onto the statewide data sharing Memorandum of Agreement;
 - Established an OVA Snowflake database by importing 100+ open-source datasets to examine veteran benefits allocation and utilization;
 - Established a Written Information Security Plan and Business Continuity Plan;
 - Restructured and standardized procedures for the OVA Salesforce system.
 - Presented OVAs efforts and plan to meet federal and state digital accessibility requirements;
- Tracked 250 veteran-related House and Senate bills in the current 2025-2026 session. OVA Informed policy makers through verbal and written testimony on veteran bills and provided an independent voice regarding improvements to programs, benefits, and services as well as data-informed views of the veteran community.
- Led event coordination between the U.S. Navy, National Park Service, VA, the Governor's Office, City of Springfield, and various stakeholders to ensure Connecticut River Valley Navy Week events were successful, and the occasion was recognized by the Commonwealth through an official proclamation from the Governor.
- Maintained an informal advisory working group to discuss veteran-related issues; includes state leaders from the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Massachusetts Veterans Service Officer Association, Military Officers Association of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America.
- Improved and maintained virtual dashboards to provide better visualization of veteran population, benefits, and services across Massachusetts through:
 - Administering in-person and virtual training sessions for state and local government staff members for the *Value of a Veteran* Dashboard.
 - Implementing accessibility features and revisions to meet all accessibility guidelines on all OVA dashboards and digital products.
 - Ingesting and analyzing new raw data elements to continuously improve and maintain current dashboards.
- Participated in a whole-of-community working group to assist Massachusetts veterans who are actively serving in the National Guard and Reserve access affordable housing.
- Established proof-of-concept teams with Dept. Of Corrections and County Jails to improve access to VA benefits and services for veterans involved in the justice system.

Issue Analysis and Recommendations

A Declining Veteran Population

Observation. The VA estimates that Massachusetts sustains a net loss of approximately 9,000 veterans per year. This estimate is supported by state vital statistics.

Discussion. Without a strategy to draw younger veterans to Massachusetts, the net loss of veterans will continue and the total veteran population in Massachusetts will diminish. Transitioning service members and working age veterans are a skilled workforce who, in many cases, also provide civic and additional economic support to their communities. These veterans can help fill needs across government and corporate entities. Some veterans can also contribute as small business owners. Additionally, a lower veteran population leads to a lower demand for VA funding in the state.

Recommendation. State agencies should strategize on how to attract and retain transitioning service members and veterans to the Commonwealth. The OVA is ready to assist in this work.

Continue the Initiative to Update the MA Definitions of Veteran

Observation. Veterans and family members are confused and frustrated when they find the definition of a veteran is not always the same across state agencies. Understanding the differing eligibility criteria can also be challenging for those facilitating access to benefits and services.

Discussion. While the HERO Act amended the definition of veteran in MGL Chapter 115 to be more inclusive and aligned with the federal definition, the foundational definition of veteran, found in MGL Chapter 4, Section 7, Clause Forty-third, remains unchanged and sets the base eligibility requirement for nearly all benefits and services not included in Chapter 115. Work on this issue began in the 193rd session of Massachusetts General Court and continues into the 194th session. The OVA supports bills HB3871 and SB2467 which would provide consistency across state and federal laws regarding the inclusion of former Space Force personnel and commissioned officers of the U.S. Public Health Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, all of whom are included in the federal definition. In addition, these bills expand the inclusion of some Reserve and National Guard service members by simplifying the current language in Chapter 4. See Appendix C for sections of MGL where the term “veteran” is defined. Chapters of MGL without a specified definition of veteran, such as Chapter 90: Motor Vehicles and Aircraft, are subject to the Chapter 4 definition.

Ongoing Work. Both bills were reported favorably by the House and Senate Committees on Veterans and Federal Affairs and are in each respective Committee on Ways and Means. The OVA is prepared to provide more information to the General Court as it considers these bills.

Support to Uniformed Service Members and Their Families

Observation. Through assessments of Massachusetts General Laws, there appears to be no agency with directed collaborative oversight of programs, benefits and services to service members and their families.

Discussion. Individuals cannot become veterans without first serving as a member of the uniformed services. To best serve service members transitioning to veteran status and civilian life, the Commonwealth should connect with them before their exit from service is complete. MGL does not currently provide authority to any specific agency to preemptively facilitate a successful service member transition or a single agency to holistically support military families residing in Massachusetts. Several agencies have limited authority to support service members and their families in modest ways.

- Bureau of Health Professions Licensure - responsibilities to assist in professional licensure for military members and their spouses.
- Department of Elementary and Secondary Education - responsibility for the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission, among other matters.
- Department of Occupational Licensure - responsibilities to assist in professional licensure for military members and their spouses.
- Executive Office of Veterans Services - responsibility to share state civilian licensure and certification requirements with military members.
- Massachusetts National Guard - responsibilities to provide benefits and services to its members and their families and provide a military spouse liaison.

Centralized support through collaboration can assist actively serving military families as well as providing transition support before military service ends.

Recommendation. Establish a commission to review best practices and comparative models to develop a recommendation on how to best support service members and their families living in, or transitioning to, Massachusetts.

Justice Involved Veterans

Observation. Veterans incarcerated in Massachusetts may not have access to physical examinations to complete their claims for benefits through the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Discussion. Work on this issue began in the last half of FY25. If a veteran is incarcerated, they are still eligible to submit a federal disability claim, yet they may not have access to physical examinations required to complete the process. Completing the veteran's claim early during

incarceration may result in some healthcare cost transfer from the state to the VA, provide financial support to the veteran's family, and is expected to enhance the veteran's reentry to society. VA disability compensation can reduce the amount of Chapter 115 financial assistance needed. At the federal level, the VA and Bureau of Prisons have shown a path forward through an agreement to allow physical examinations in prisons to complete the claims process.

Ongoing Work. The OVA is leading collaborative efforts with the Department of Corrections, County Jails, an accredited claims agent, and the US Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct proof of concept for facilitating VA examinations to complete disability ratings while a veteran is incarcerated. An initial roadblock is misdirected notifications to incarcerated veterans and their accredited agent, which lead to cancelled medical examinations and rejections of claims. Work continues in developing improved notification procedures and timely approval of facility entry for medical personnel.

Conclusion

Following the FY25 focus on establishment and building of the OVA, in FY26 the OVA completed its first fully operational year into its statutory responsibilities of examining systems, aiding and coordinating with Veterans Service Officers, conducting fatality investigations, and participating in groups focused on improving benefits and services.

The latter part of this report identifies specific issues that can improve the lives of veterans and their families in the Commonwealth through better information and strategic initiatives. Most relate to the delivery of benefits and services to veterans, while others relate to recognizing the value veterans bring to our communities. The OVA supports data sharing and analysis as a key component to identifying more specific details about the veteran population, understanding what efforts are most effective at improving their lives, and identifying recommendations for improvements. The OVA believes that collaborative efforts can refine and implement these recommendations.

As the OVA begins FY27, we are shifting to a defined strategic plan guided by stakeholders and aligned with our mission. Based on stakeholder assessments, there are a significant number of opportunities for this office to help improve the lives of veterans and their families residing in the Commonwealth, specifically in the areas of benefits and services, housing, and employment.

Vox Veteranorum

APPENDIX A – Glossary and Acronyms

Benefit - A statutory or regulatory entitlement that provides an eligible veteran a direct financial advantage, tax relief, payment, fee reduction, or legally enforceable economic preference.

Key Elements

- Direct economic value to the veteran
- Non-discretionary once eligibility is verified
- No ongoing staff assistance required after approval

Examples

- Property tax exemption
- Tuition waiver
- Cash bonus
- State pension supplement
- License/registration fee waiver
- Hiring preference with measurable advantage

Program (or Support Program) - A state initiative that provides funding, grants, contracts, training, or institutional resources to organizations that deliver services to veterans rather than directly serving veterans.

Key Elements

- Recipient is an organization
- Indirect benefit to veterans
- Builds service delivery capacity

Examples

- Grants to veteran nonprofits
- Funding for county veteran service officers
- Contracts with behavioral health providers
- Training for accredited service officers
- Capital funding for shelters

Recognition - A formal designation, honor, or symbolic acknowledgment provided to veterans that confers status or public recognition but provides no direct financial value or assistance.

Key Elements

- Honorary in nature
- Verification but not assistance
- No measurable economic gain

Examples

- Veteran designation on driver's license
- Specialty license plate (full fee required)
- State medals or certificates
- Honor rolls
- Commemorative programs

Service - A programmatic activity delivered to veterans that provides assistance, intervention, care, counseling, coordination, or facilitated access to resources but does not itself provide a direct financial entitlement.

Key Elements

- Staff or provider interaction required
- Individualized or operational delivery
- May help obtain benefits
- No inherent monetary transfer

Examples

- Claims assistance
- Employment counseling
- Mental health counseling
- Housing navigation
- Legal aid clinics
- Outreach and case management

Acronyms

DOC - Massachusetts Department of Corrections

DPH - Massachusetts Department of Public Health

DTA – Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

EOHHS- Executive Office of Health and Human Services

EOTSS - Executive Office of Technology Services and Security

EOVS - Executive Office of Veterans Services in Massachusetts

FYxx - fiscal year for Massachusetts government which begins July 1st and ends June 30th. The numbers following FY represent the calendar year of the June end date

MGL - Massachusetts General Laws

MMA - Massachusetts Municipal Association; a nonpartisan trade association for the municipal of Massachusetts

MVSOA - Massachusetts Veterans Service Officers Association; a Massachusetts nonprofit member organization comprised of staff (Directors, Veterans Service Officers, Investigators, and Administrative Assistants) of the Veterans Services offices across the Commonwealth

NCVAS – National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics

OVA - Office of the Veteran Advocate

VA - US Department of Veterans Affairs

VBOC - Veteran Business Owners Outreach Center

APPENDIX B – MGL Chapter 115B, Section 2

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 115B, § 2

There shall be an office of the veteran advocate, which shall be independent of any supervision or control by any executive agency.

The office shall:

- (i)** ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive humane and dignified treatment at all times, with full respect for the veterans' personal dignity and right to privacy;
- (ii)** ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive timely, safe and effective services;
- (iii)** aid and coordinate with local veterans service officers to ensure veterans receive all available state and federal benefits;
- (iv)** examine, on a system-wide basis, the care and services that executive agencies provide veterans;
- (v)** advise the public and those at the highest levels of state government about how the commonwealth may improve its services to and for veterans and their families;
- (vi)** develop internal procedures appropriate for the effective performance of the office's duties;
- (vii)** act as a liaison to all state agencies providing services to veterans to ensure each veteran receives necessary services and care;
- (viii)** assist in developing procedures for the executive agencies to best serve the veteran community;
- (ix)** act as a liaison to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and all other relevant federal agencies to advocate on behalf of the veterans of the commonwealth; and
- (x)** investigate incidents where a veteran suffered a fatality, near fatality or serious bodily or emotional injury while receiving services from an executive agency, or circumstances which result in a reasonable belief that an executive agency or a constituent agency failed in its duty to care for a veteran and, as a result, the veteran was at imminent risk of, or suffered serious bodily or emotional injury or death.

APPENDIX C – Definitions of Veteran in Massachusetts General Laws

Chapter 4, Section 7, Clause Forty-third

Forty-third, "Veteran" shall mean (1) any person, (a) whose last discharge or release from his wartime service as defined herein, was under honorable conditions and who (b) served in the army, navy, marine corps, coast guard, or air force of the United States, or on full time national guard duty under Titles 10 or 32 of the United States Code or under sections 38, 40 and 41 of chapter 33 for not less than 90 days active service, at least 1 day of which was for wartime service; provided, however, than any person who so served in wartime and was awarded a service-connected disability or a Purple Heart, or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete 90 days of active service; (2) a member of the American Merchant Marine who served in armed conflict between December 7, 1941 and December 31, 1946, and who has received honorable discharges from the United States Coast Guard, Army, or Navy; (3) any person (a) whose last discharge from active service was under honorable conditions, and who (b) served in the army, navy, marine corps, coast guard, or air force of the United States for not less than 180 days active service; provided, however, that any person who so served and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete 180 days of active service.

"Wartime service" shall mean service performed by a "Spanish War veteran", a "World War I veteran", a "World War II veteran", a "Korean veteran", a "Vietnam veteran", a "Lebanese peace keeping force veteran", a "Grenada rescue mission veteran", a "Panamanian intervention force veteran", a "Persian Gulf veteran", or a member of the "WAAC" as defined in this clause during any of the periods of time described herein or for which such medals described below are awarded.

"Spanish War veteran" shall mean any veteran who performed such wartime service between February fifteenth, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight and July fourth, nineteen hundred and two.

"World War I veteran" shall mean any veteran who (a) performed such wartime service between April sixth, nineteen hundred and seventeen and November eleventh, nineteen hundred and eighteen, or (b) has been awarded the World War I Victory Medal, or (c) performed such service between March twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and seventeen and August fifth, nineteen hundred and seventeen, as a Massachusetts National Guardsman.

"World War II veteran" shall mean any veteran who performed such wartime service between September 16, 1940 and July 25, 1947, and was awarded a World War II Victory Medal, except that for the purposes of chapter 31 it shall mean all active service between the dates of September 16, 1940 and June 25, 1950.

"Korean veteran" shall mean any veteran who performed such wartime service between June twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and fifty and January thirty-first, nineteen hundred and fifty-five, both dates inclusive, and any person who has received the Korea Defense Service Medal as established in the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2003.

"Korean emergency" shall mean the period between June twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and fifty and January thirty-first, nineteen hundred and fifty-five, both dates inclusive.

"Vietnam veteran" shall mean (1) any person who performed such wartime service during the period commencing August fifth, nineteen hundred and sixty-four and ending on May seventh, nineteen hundred and seventy-five, both dates inclusive, or (2) any person who served at least one hundred and eighty days of active service in the armed forces of the United States during the period between February first, nineteen hundred and fifty-five and August fourth, nineteen hundred and sixty-four; provided, however, that for the purposes of the application of the provisions of chapter thirty-one, it shall also include all active service between the dates May seventh, nineteen hundred and seventy-five and June fourth, nineteen hundred and seventy-six; and provided, further, that any such person who served in said armed forces during said period and was awarded a service-connected disability or a Purple Heart, or who died in said service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete one hundred and eighty days of active service.

"Lebanese peace keeping force veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service and received a campaign medal for such service during the period commencing August twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and eighty-two and ending when the President of the United States shall have withdrawn armed forces from the country of Lebanon.

"Grenada rescue mission veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service and received a campaign medal for such service during the period commencing October twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and eighty-three to December fifteenth, nineteen hundred and eighty-three, inclusive.

"Panamanian intervention force veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service and received a campaign medal for such service during the period commencing December twentieth, nineteen hundred and eighty-nine and ending January thirty-first, nineteen hundred and ninety.

"Persian Gulf veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service during the period commencing August second, nineteen hundred and ninety and ending on a date to be determined by presidential proclamation or executive order and concurrent resolution of the Congress of the United States.

"WAAC" shall mean any woman who was discharged and so served in any corps or unit of the United States established for the purpose of enabling women to serve with, or as auxiliary to, the armed forces of the United States and such woman shall be deemed to be a veteran.

None of the following shall be deemed to be a "veteran":

(a) Any person who at the time of entering into the armed forces of the United States had declared his intention to become a subject or citizen of the United States and withdrew his intention under the provisions of the act of Congress approved July ninth, nineteen hundred and eighteen.

(b) Any person who was discharged from the said armed forces on his own application or solicitation by reason of his being an enemy alien.

(c) Any person who has been proved guilty of willful desertion.

(d) Any person whose only service in the armed forces of the United States consists of his service as a member of the coast guard auxiliary or as a temporary member of the coast guard reserve, or both.

(e) Any person whose last discharge or release from the armed forces is dishonorable.

"Armed forces" shall include army, navy, marine corps, air force and coast guard.

"Active service in the armed forces", as used in this clause shall not include active duty for training in the army national guard or air national guard or active duty for training as a reservist in the armed forces of the United States.

Chapter 15E, Section 1 (Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children)

"Veteran", a person who served in the uniformed services and who was discharged or released from service under conditions other than dishonorable.

Chapter 31, Section 1 (Civil Service Law)

"Veteran", any person who:

(1) comes within the definition of a veteran appearing in the forty-third clause of section seven of chapter four; or,

(2) comes within such definition except that instead of having performed "wartime service" as defined therein, he has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor or one of the following campaign badges: Second Nicaraguan Campaign, Yangtze Service, Navy Occupation Service, Army of Occupation or Medal for Humane Action; or,

(3) is a person eligible to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor or one of the campaign badges enumerated in clause (2) of this paragraph and who presents proof of such eligibility which is satisfactory to the administrator.

A veteran shall not include active duty for training in the army national guard or air national guard or active duty for training as a reservist in the armed forces of the United States.

"Wartime service", the same meaning as specified in the forty-third clause of section seven of chapter four, or active service in the armed forces of the United States in any campaign for which an award was made of any of the campaign badges enumerated in the definition of "veteran" in this section.

Chapter 32, Section 1 (Public Employee Retirement Systems)

"Veteran", any person who (a) is a veteran as defined in clause Forty-third of section seven of chapter four; or (b) meets all the requirements of said clause Forty-third except that instead of performing wartime service as so defined he has been awarded one of the campaign badges enumerated in the definition of "Veteran" in section one of chapter thirty-one; or (c) meets all the requirements of said clause Forty-third except that instead of performing ninety days' active service, including ten days' wartime service, he has performed active service in the armed forces of the United States at any time between April sixth, nineteen hundred and seventeen and November eleventh, nineteen hundred and eighteen, inclusive.

Chapter 115, Section 1, as amended by the HERO Act on August 8, 2024 (Financial and other Assistance to Veterans and their Families)

"Veteran", any person who (a) is a veteran as defined in clause Forty-third of section 7 of chapter 4; or (b) served on active duty in the armed forces for at least 90 days and whose last discharge or release was under conditions other than dishonorable; or (c) served on active duty, to include active duty solely for training purposes, in the armed forces, and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable; or (d) served in the national guard or as a reservist in any branch of the armed forces, including active duty solely for training purposes, and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable; or (e) is determined to be a veteran according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; provided, that in any case, the service of such person qualified under clause (a) through clause (e) was entered into or served in Massachusetts, or such person has resided in the commonwealth for 1 day, except for the purpose of determining the residential eligibility of a deceased veteran's dependents.

Chapter 121B, Section 1 (Housing and Urban Renewal)

"Veteran", any person who is a veteran as defined in clause Forty-third of section seven of chapter four. The word "veteran" as used herein shall also include the spouse, surviving spouse, parent or other dependent of such person.