

2015 Session Review

5/5/15 – The Governor signed SF 1455, Chapter 16, a bill that repeals an outdated statute allowing district courts to appoint the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs as guardian of the estate of a veteran or dependent. Effective August 1, 2015.

5/14/15 – The Governor signed HF 1556, Chapter 40, a bill that changes “Hire a Veteran Month” from May to July in Minnesota. Effective August 1, 2015.

5/14/15 – The Governor signed HF 450, Chapter 41, a bill that designates the Sunday before Memorial Day as “Military Spouses and Families Day”. Effective August 1, 2015.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed HF 546, Chapter 66, the state government bill that will allow the state and local government veteran service entities to share military discharge forms with one another. Effective August 1, 2015.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed SF 5, Chapter 69, the Omnibus Higher Education Finance Bill. This includes the establishment of a veterans-to-agriculture pilot program funded at \$175,000 in fiscal year 2016 and \$175,000 in fiscal year 2017. Effective July 1, 2015.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed SF 1458, Chapter 71, the Omnibus Health and Human Services Finance Bill. This includes language stating Stearns County Veterans Housing receives \$85,000 each year of the biennium for a grant to Stearns County to provide administrative funding in support of a service provider serving veterans. It also includes \$100,000 in fiscal year 2016 for grants to nonprofit organizations to provide resources and referrals for culturally specific mental health services to Southeast Asian veterans born before 1965 who do not qualify for services available to veterans formally discharged from the United States armed forces. Effective July 1, 2015.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed SF 878, Chapter 65, the Omnibus Public Safety and Judiciary Finance and Policy Bill. It contains a section regarding eligibility reciprocity examination for the firefighting occupation based on relevant military experience. A person who passed the examination shall not be eligible to be licensed as a firefighter until honorably discharged as evidenced by the most recent DD-214. Effective August 1, 2015.

5/23/15 – The Governor signed SF 888, Chapter 77, the Omnibus State Government Finance bill.

Final House Vote: 71-61 **Final Senate Vote:** 44-21

The bill contains the following items of veterans interest:

Article 1, Section 37 [Agency Appropriation] appropriates \$142,785,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the biennium. Effective July 1, 2015.

- New this year is a provision that requests The Office of the Legislative Auditor to conduct a special review of the Department of Veterans Affairs financial management of

Minnesota veterans homes. The review should include management of increasing compensation costs, including any projected increases in staffing levels; use of reserve funds in the special revenue fund to manage shortfalls in funding; implementation of federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services certification requirements; operation of the adult day care program at the Minneapolis campus; and, management of facilities operating costs, including plans to address the needs of aging facilities. Effective after July 1, 2015

- \$44,000 is being routed through MDVA back to the Department of Education to implement the expedited and temporary licensing provisions. This funding was unspent in the last biennium by DoE so the appropriation is available until June 30, 2017.
- \$353,000 to the Veterans Service Organizations: DAV, MOPH, American Legion, VFW, AMVETS, VVA, and Paralyzed Veterans of America. Effective July 1, 2015.
- \$750,000 each year to Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MAC-V). Effective July 1, 2015.
- \$200,000 each year for Honor Guards at funerals of veterans. Effective July 1, 2015.
- \$200,000 each year for the costs of administering the Minnesota GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits, on-the-job training and apprenticeship program. Effective July 1, 2015.
- \$100,000 each year for administering the Gold Star Program for surviving family members of deceased veterans. Effective July 1, 2015.
- \$1.1M each year for funding the County Veterans Service Office grant program. Effective July 1, 2015.
- General fund appropriations made to the department may be transferred to a veterans homes special revenue account in the special revenue fund in the same manner as other receipts are deposited.
- The department will seek opportunities to maximize federal reimbursements of Medicare-eligible expenses and will provide annual reports to the commissioner of management and budget on the federal Medicare reimbursements received.
- Before the Commissioner of Administration certified that a small business is majority-owned and operated by a veteran, the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs must verify that the owner of the small business is a veteran, as defined in section 197.447. Effective August 1, 2015.
- Expedited and temporary licensing for former and current members of the military in a variety of skill areas; adds optometrist, dietician or nutritionist, marriage and family

therapist, professional counselor, professional clinical counselor, podiatric medicine, and a barber. Additionally the appropriate board must establish a license for cosmetologist, nail technicians and estheticians in accordance with MS 197.4552. Effective August 1, 2015.

- Money appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs from the “Support Our Troops” account has been expanded to include grants of up to \$100,000 to any organization approved by the commissioner for the purpose of supporting and improving the lives of veterans and their families and grants to an eligible foundation. Effective August 1, 2015.
- The Commissioner of Veterans Affairs must report by February each year to the chairs and ranking minority members of the committees with jurisdiction over military and veterans affairs on the number, amounts, and use of grants made from the “Support Our Troops” account in the previous year. Effective August 1, 2015.
- Trustees appointed to the Big Island trust have the authority to remove a trustee of the trust upon a majority vote of the trustees with the consent of the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs. Effective August 1, 2015.
- Veterans who have been notified of intent to discharge may request a hearing in writing by a civil service board or commission, a merit authority or a three-person panel.

If the veteran fails to identify the veteran’s election, the governmental subdivision may select the hearing body.

For disputes heard by a civil service board, the political subdivisions shall bear all costs associated with the hearing but not including attorney fees for attorneys representing the veteran.

For disputes heard by a three-person panel, all parties shall bear equally all costs associated with the hearing, but not including attorney fees for attorneys representing the veteran.

If the veteran prevails in a dispute heard by a civil service board or a three-person panel and the hearing reverses all aspects of the discharge, the governmental subdivision shall pay the veteran’s reasonable attorney fees.

Effective the day following final enactment and applies to all notices of intent to discharge issued on or after that date. (Approx. May 23, 2015)

- The Honor and Remember Flag is recognized as an appropriate symbol that acknowledges the ultimate sacrifice made by the fallen members of the United States armed forces in the line of duty and suggests days for flag display. The Honor and Remember Flag is protected by U.S. copyright. Effective the day following final

enactment and applies to all notices of intent to discharge issued on or after that date.
(Approx. May 23, 2015)

- The Commissioner may not close a Veterans Home unless closure of the home is specifically authorized or required by a law enacted after July 1, 2015.

The 1st Special Session 2015 took place June 12-13, 2015 and the Governor signed the following into law:

Chapter 1, HF 3: Jobs and Energy Bill

Of veterans interest:

- The commissioner of employment and economic development, in consultation with the commissioner of labor and industry shall collaborate with MnSCU and employers to develop and administer a customized training program for skilled manufacturing industries that integrates academic instruction and job-related learning in the workplace and MnSCU institutions. Retired and disabled veterans are among the targeted groups. Effective August 1, 2015.

Chapter 2, SF 1: Legacy Bill

Of veterans interest:

- \$113,000 the first year for the Disabled Veterans Rest Camp Association for the veterans rest camp on Big Marine Lake for parks, trails, and recreation areas.
- \$100,000 each year for the Minnesota Humanities Center to be used for the veterans' voices program. Effective July 1, 2015.

Chapter 4, SF 5: Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Finance Bill.

Of veterans interest:

- A resident from a Minnesota veterans home may obtain a firearm or muzzleloader deer license during the season and take antlerless deer without a permit in all areas of the state open during the respective regular firearms or muzzleloader deer seasons in any permit area. A person may assist a Minnesota veterans home resident during the firearms or muzzleloader deer season without having a deer license, but the person may not shoot a deer. Effective August 1, 2015.

Chapter 5, HF 2: Bonding Bill

Of veterans interest:

- \$650,000 for predesign and design, including environmental assessment, for the rehabilitation of the bridge located over Minnehaha Creek linking South Minnehaha Drive and the Minneapolis Veterans Home.
- \$300,000 from the general fund to the city of Sauk Centre for a grant to Eagle's Healing Nest to replace the roof at its facility that serves veterans, service members and their families in Sauk Centre.
- The unexpended balance from the 2012 appropriation to predesign and design for demolition of the south wing of Building 17 and adjoining facilities and designing the

south wing of Building 17 as a new skilled nursing building, is added to the \$18,935,000 appropriation.

Unless otherwise specified, the appropriations in this act are available until the project is completed or abandoned subject to Minnesota Statutes, section 16A.642. Effective the day following final enactment.

The Legislature is adjourned until 12:00 noon Tuesday, March 8, 2016.