



State Legislative Update for the Week of May 16 - 22, 2015

The Governor signed HF 1556, Chapter 40, the bill that changes “Hire a Veteran Month’ from May to July in Minnesota. The bill passed unanimously in both chambers.

The Governor signed HF 450, Chapter 41, the bill that designates the Sunday before Memorial Day as “Military Spouses and Families Day”. The bill passed unanimously in both chambers.

Saturday, May 16, 2015

Senate Session

Bill introductions of veterans interest:

Senator Metzen introduced:

SF 2203: A bill for an act relating to capital investment; appropriating money for improvements to the Veterans Memorial Community Center in Inver Grove Heights; authorizing the sale and issuance of state bonds.
Referred to the Committee on Capital Investment.

House Session

Bill introductions of veterans interest: None

Sunday, May 17, 2015

Senate Session

Bill introductions of veterans interest: None

HF 546, a bill permitting a government entity to release certain military release forms to another government entity for a limited purpose, was placed on final passage and passed 59–0.

The Senate passed **SF 5**, the Higher Education Conference Committee Report, 57–8. Of interest is the establishment of a veterans-to-agriculture pilot program funded at \$175,000 in fiscal year 2016 and \$175,000 in fiscal year 2017.

The Senate passed **SF 1458**, the Health and Human Services Conference Committee Report, 49–16. 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. Also included is \$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.

SF 878, Omnibus Public Safety Finance and Policy Bill, as amended by the Conference Committee Report, passed the Senate 55-9. It contains a section regarding eligibility reciprocity examination for 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.

House Session

Bill introductions of veterans interest: None

The House passed **SF 5**, the Higher Education Conference Committee Report, 71–57.

The House passed **SF 1458**, the Health and Human Services Conference Committee Report, 99-31.

The House passed **SF 878**, the Public Safety Finance and Policy Bill, as amended by the Conference Committee Report, 116-15.

Monday, May 18, 2015

Senate Session

Bill introductions of veterans interest: None

The Senate passed **SF 888**, the State Government Finance Bill as amended by Conference Committee on a vote of 44-21. Of veterans interest are the following provisions:

- The Office of the Legislative Auditor is 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.
- \$44,000 for a transfer to the Department of Education to implement the expedited and temporary licensing provisions. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2017.

- \$353,000 to the Veterans Service Organizations: DAV, MOPH, American Legion, VFW, AMVETS, and Paralyzed Veterans of America.
- \$750,000 each year to Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MAC-V).
- \$200,000 each year for Honor Guards at funerals of veterans.
- \$200,000 each year for the costs of administering the Minnesota GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits, on-the-job training and apprenticeship program.
- \$100,000 each year for administering the Gold Star Program for surviving family members of deceased veterans.
- \$1.1M each year for funding the County Veterans Service Office grant program.
- 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 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.
- Expedited and temporary licensing for former and current members of the military in a variety of skill areas.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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 Senate passed **HF 846**, the Omnibus Environment and Natural Resources Finance Bill, as amended by the Conference Committee report, on a vote of 35-30. Of veterans interest is the provision that allows a resident from a Minnesota veterans home to 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 hunting license, but the person may not shoot a deer.

House Session

Bill introductions of veterans interest: None

The House passed **SF 888**, the Omnibus State Government Finance Bill, as amended by Conference Committee, 71-61.

The House passed **HF 846**, the Omnibus Environment and Natural Resources Finance Bill, as amended by Conference Committee, 83-50.

The House passed **HF 303**, the Omnibus Legacy Funding Bill, as amended by Conference Committee, on a vote of 123-11. It contained \$113,000 for the first year for the Disabled Veterans Rest Camp on Big Marine Lake for parks, trails and recreation areas; and, \$100,000 each year to the Minnesota Humanities Center for the veterans' voices program. **Unfortunately**, the Conference Committee Report did not reach the Senate in time for a vote so the Omnibus Legacy Bill did not pass this session.

The Governor vetoed HF 844, the E-12 Education Policy and Finance Bill, and is planning for a Special Session.