



State Legislative Update for April 9 – 15, 2016

Committee Hearings

House:

State Government Finance heard two Veterans related bills-

[HF 2868](#) – Pugh: Emergency dental care bill was passed and re-referred to Taxes. Due to deadlines it was then re-referred again to the Rules Committee, where it will potentially be given a waiver and then sent to Taxes.

[HF 2342](#) – Dettmer: This is the bill that would create a memorial on the Capitol Grounds for Medal of Honor recipients from Minnesota. It was passed and re-referred to the Rules Committee.

Property Tax and Local Government Finance Division heard Rep. Freiberg's [HF 3118](#). This bill allows a deadline extension for the disabled veteran homestead market value exclusion. It was laid over for possible inclusion in an omnibus bill.

State Government Finance released its supplemental budget bill on Wednesday. It had a few sections related to Veterans. The committee passed the bill to Ways and Means.

- **Appropriation Reduction by Executive Agencies:** Section 11 of the bill specifically asks MMB to reduce general fund appropriations to executive agencies. **The bill excludes MDVA from the mandatory cuts by the MMB commissioner**, along with Military Affairs, DHS, Corrections and Public Safety.
- **Eagle's Healing Nest:** \$100,000 is appropriated to Eagle's Healing Nest, located in Sauk Centre. The center focuses on "healing the invisible wounds of war." The center is a "public charity" per the IRS and provides a variety of services to former service members and Veterans. It not directly affiliated with the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs nor the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs and derives most of its funding through donations and private contributions. The appropriation would help them continue providing those services. This is the language from Rep. M. Anderson's [HF 2468](#).
- **State Soldiers Assistance Fund, for housing and health:** \$300,000 is appropriated to (MHFA or MDVA) to fund housing assistance and health assistance to veterans. This policy originated with Rep. Howe and the House Veterans Division Committee members, but language for the appropriation was not fleshed out in a specific bill prior to inclusion in the Omnibus Bill. MDVA is unaware of specific stakeholders' support for this bill, though the agency is well positioned to utilize the appropriation.
- **Cottages of Anoka:** \$100,000 is appropriated to help create housing opportunities for Veterans, in the form of rent subsidies, at the Cottages of Anoka near the Rum River in partnership with the county and the CommonBond Housing. This language comes from Rep. Newtwn's [HF 2565](#).
- **Veterans Preference Act:** This policy language is from [HF 3416 \(Howe\)](#). The language changes Veterans Preference processes to remove or discharge a veteran from the State and Local Government Position. The bill, in its current form, was drafted based on suggestions provided by the MDVA Veterans Preference Officer as an attempt to fix issues with Veterans Preference statutory language.

These "issues" are changes to the law implemented following last session as a result of legislation language being mishandled during conference committee. It should be noted that this bill was not heard by the full State Government Finance committee until it was included in the [H3168DE3](#) bill (Section 19, *page 15*). Furthermore, discussions between Rep. Howe and representatives of the Association of Minnesota Counties & League of Minnesota Cities are ongoing for an amendment to this section. MDVA is monitoring those discussions and will provide updates as details become available.

Next week:

[HF 3252](#) is scheduled for a floor vote on Monday, April 18. This is Rep. Newberger's bill that extends the deadline for Veterans to have their real estate license reinstated.

The Tax Committee will hear [HF 2868](#) on Tuesday at 10:15am in Room 200 of the State Office Building. This is the bill to provide emergency dental care to Veterans.

The Ways and Means committee will complete the supplemental budget next week by Thursday, which is the third deadline.

Senate:

State Departments and Veterans Affairs heard [SF 3149](#), which would establish a feasibility study to create interim housing facilities for Veterans. The bill was laid over for possible inclusion in a budget bill.

On Wednesday, State Departments and Veterans Affairs released its supplemental budget proposal. It included the following sections that relates to Veterans. The Senate Finance committee adopted these sections on Friday for what will be the entire supplemental budget bill.

- **Targeted-Group and Veterans Business Mentoring Program.** Appropriates \$20,000 to implement a new mentoring program for businesses owned by women, people of certain ethnic backgrounds, people with disabilities and veterans. This is a onetime appropriation from Sen. Hayden's [SF 2738](#).
- **Veterans' Voices Radio Program.** Appropriates \$50,000 to the Association of Minnesota Public Educational Radio Stations (AMPERS) to promote the Veterans Voices program with programming emphasis on Vietnam Veterans experiences, similar to an AMPERS series on World War II Veterans. This is a onetime appropriation from Sen. Saxhaug's [SF 2628](#).
- **Veterans Voices Humanities Center.** Appropriates \$95,000 in grant money to the Minnesota Humanities Center via the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs to expand the Veterans' Voices programing and staffing. Veterans' Voices is a program focused on educating and engaging the community regarding Veterans' contributions, knowledge, skills and experiences. This is a onetime appropriation from Sen. Jensen's [SF 2599](#).
- **Veterans Homes Domiciliary Increase.** Appropriates \$88,000 to increase the personal needs allowance of domiciliary residents of Minnesota State Veterans Homes. Item raises the minimum to a specified amount in each of FY17 & FY18, and thereafter ties annual increases to one-half the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from Sen. Sieben's [SF 131](#).
- **Veterans Mental Health Study.** Appropriates \$150,000 to the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs to perform, or contract with a statewide nonprofit to perform, a study to quantify and describe unmet behavioral and mental health services needs amongst Minnesota's Veterans. The study is to include focus groups with stakeholders, including Veterans and their families, County Veteran Service Officers, representatives of U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and community referral centers. This is a onetime appropriation from Sen. Saxhaug's [SF 2317](#).
- **Disabled Veterans Interim Housing Study.** Appropriates \$250,000 to the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs to study the feasibility of partnering with an established nonprofit with the goal of providing interim housing to disabled Veterans awaiting residency at a Minnesota Veterans Home. MDVA is to report findings and recommendations to house and senate committees by Feb 15, 2017. This is a onetime appropriation from Sen. Clausen's [SF 3149](#).
- **New Veterans Homes Operating Costs (Bemidji and Montevideo).** Adds money to the base in FY 2018 & 2019 for the operating costs associated with new Minnesota Veterans Homes in Montevideo and Bemidji. The appropriation is specifically allocated to the operation of new Veterans homes to be built and cannot be used for operations at a Veterans home in Minneapolis. This would be an ongoing appropriation from Sen. Saxhaug's [SF 2856](#).

Note: A \$16M bonding appropriation for the state portion of construction costs for the proposed Veterans homes currently lies with Capital Investment. See also Sen. Saxhaug's [SF 2856](#).

Next week:

No Veterans related bills are scheduled in committee or on the Senate floor.

The Finance committee will complete the supplemental budget next week by Thursday, which is the third deadline.

Legislation

A number of bills related to Veterans issues were introduced this week. Follow the [State Bill Tracker](#) for updates to these bills.

[HF 3880](#) – Davnie: Veterans' plate designs for expeditionary medals established.