



Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services

Changes to Chapter 115 – Safety Net Program in Response to the COVID-19 Public Health Crisis



During the COVID-19 public health crisis, it is important that veterans of the Commonwealth continue to receive state sponsored Chapter 115 veterans' benefits. These are provided through the continued assistance of their local Veteran Service Officer (VSO), the primary source and first stop in applications for state benefits. VSOs can also assist veterans obtain federal benefits and a host of other social services.

The Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) has made temporary changes to the application process for Chapter 115 benefits that will remain in effect until the conclusion of the public health crisis. These flexibilities make it easier for veterans to apply for and receive benefits. They will also help DVS and local VSOs continue providing veteran benefits in a safe and timely manner.

Updates to the Chapter 115 – Safety Net Program include:

- Starting on March 20, 2020, DVS implemented a 60-day authorization extension on all current and pending cases. DVS has extended this extension through September 1, 2020.
- VSOs will approve qualifying applications without first obtaining DVS preapproval
- VSOs will exercise liberal judgment when evaluating an application and have been instructed to draw reasonable conclusions in favor of the applicant
- Applicants are only required to provide minimum proof of eligibility for benefits, which includes a service discharge document (DD214) and any of the following documents that proves residency:
 - Mortgage statement or rental contract
 - Utility bill
 - Massachusetts Driver's License or Massachusetts ID
 - Bank statement
 - Letter of residency from a shelter or transitional home
 - Current voter registration
 - Notarized "Letter of Residency"
 - US Postal contract agreement
- The requirement for unemployed applicants to actively be seeking employment has been suspended for the duration of the public health crisis
- The requirement to submit proper burial documentation for a veteran within 60 days of passing has been extended to 180 days, until further notice
- Applicants can appeal a Notice of Action via email or by mailing back the form after writing the following on the Notice of Action: "I wish to appeal to DVS"
- Until further notice, all DVS appeal hearings will be held telephonically
- Applications shall not require signature.

The Department of Veterans' Services continues to partner with the Massachusetts Veteran Service Officer Association (MVSOA) to reach out to Veteran Service Officers (VSO) and gather feedback on current protocols and adjust where needed to ensure each veteran continues to receive all benefits they are entitled to. [For more information on how to apply for Chapter 115 benefits, please click here.](#)