



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
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To: Local Officials

From: Executive Office of Veterans Services

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Subject: HERO Act Information for Municipalities and Recipients

On August 8, 2024, Governor Healey signed into law *An Act Honoring, Empowering, and Recognizing our Servicemembers and Veterans* (HERO Act, Chapter 178 of the Acts of 2024). The HERO Act is the most comprehensive piece of veteran legislation in Massachusetts history, reforming programs and services offered by the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) and other agencies within state government. This message is to highlight a few important changes that impact municipalities, and the local administration and payment of Chapter 115 veterans' benefits. Below is a summation of these specific provisions:

Veterans Graves Officer

- Allows municipalities to appoint the spouse of a veteran or Gold Star family member to be a veterans' graves officer if no qualified, willing, and able veteran applies for the appointment.

HERO Act M.G.L. Chapter 115 Financial Benefits

- The HERO Act provides a \$500 annual increase in the disabled veteran annuity from \$2,000 to \$2,500. This increase will be phased in over two years. Veterans will receive a payment of \$1,250 in February of 2025. Starting in August of 2025, veterans will receive **one** annuity check per year of \$2,500.
- Municipalities may disburse Ch. 115 veterans benefits by direct deposit or by mail upon the recommendation of a veterans service officer and written authorization from the veteran or dependent.
- Updated M.G.L. Ch. 115, section 5 to resolve a conflict with veterans who receive both state and federal financial assistance. This update will ensure that veterans whose other benefits are increased due to adjustments in Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) will not lose access to assistance under the Chapter 115 benefits program for each calendar year.

- Updates the eligibility for dependents of veterans under M.G.L. Ch. 115, section 5. Under the prior law, dependents were required to be residents of Massachusetts for three years before they had access to assistance under the Chapter 115 benefits program. Although EOVS resolved this issue in practice, the law was changed to ensure that dependents of veterans who are in need of assistance have a one-day residency requirement rather than a three year wait before they can receive help.
- Broadens the definition of a veteran. This change better aligns the state Chapter 115 program definition of a veteran with the federal Veterans Affairs definition. This change allows more Massachusetts veterans to be eligible for benefits provided by EOVS such as our annuity, Chapter 115 benefits, access to the Massachusetts Veterans Homes, and peer to peer supports.
- Updated the medical assistance program administered under 108 C.M.R. Section 10. Prior to the implementation of the HERO Act, behavioral health services were not available to veterans under this program. Now, behavioral health reimbursement is available to eligible veterans.
- Provides clear statutory authority for EOVS to provide certain medical and dental benefits.

The full text of the HERO Act can be found here:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2024/Chapter178>.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our legal department at eovslegal@mass.gov.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to supporting the mission and delivering exceptional services to veterans of the Commonwealth.