

OFFICE OF THE VETERAN ADVOCATE
ANNUAL REPORT
Fiscal Year 2024



November 2024

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Bob Notch, Veteran Advocate

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This report meets the requirements of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 115B, Section 2.

Report annually to the governor, the senate president, the speaker of the house of representatives, the senate and the house committees on ways and means, and the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs on the activities of the office, including, but not limited to,

a. an analysis of the delivery of services to veterans and recommendations for changes in agency procedures which would enable the commonwealth to better provide services to and for veterans and their families_and

b. priorities for implementation of those changes to services.



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE VETERAN ADVOCATE
100 HANCOCK STREET, 2ND FLOOR
QUINCY, MA 02171

November 7, 2024

Dear Governor Healy, Legislative Leaders and Citizens of the Commonwealth,

I am pleased and honored to submit this inaugural fiscal year annual report for the Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA). This report covers my first eight months creating this new office. I was appointed as the Veteran Advocate by Governor Healey, Attorney General Campbell and Auditor DiZoglio on November 10, 2023, in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 115B. The position of Veteran Advocate and the independent Office of the Veteran Advocate are the first of their kind nationally and the result of groundbreaking legislation enacted by the General Court in Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022.

This initial report primarily focuses on the progress of establishing a new independent state agency while attending to issues within the OVA's directed responsibilities. Future annual reports will focus more on system-wide reviews of executive agency delivery of programs, benefits and services to veterans and their families. Annual reports will be augmented by special reports and investigations released throughout the year as we bring light to initiatives and efforts that may have been neglected over time or by capacity limitations. My focus is to build a solid administrative and cultural foundation for the OVA through FY2025, allowing full concentration in the years beyond addressing issues, providing recommendations and collaborating on solutions to improve the wellbeing of veterans and their families living in the Commonwealth.

The rapid progress in building this new agency is evident in this report. It was only possible through the facilitation provided by the Office of the Governor, Executive Office for Administration and Finance, Office of the Comptroller, Human Resources Division, Executive Office of Technology Services and Security, and the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance. I offer my deepest gratitude to the professionals who match my enthusiasm in bringing the OVA to life.

The growing team of experienced professionals at the Office of the Veteran Advocate brings broad and diverse perspectives on military and veteran issues. They prove their value daily and are second to none. Along with government and community partners, we are focused and committed to improving the lives of veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert Notch".

Robert Notch
Veteran Advocate

Executive Summary

The inaugural annual report of the Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) for Fiscal Year 2024 is hereby presented to the governor, senate president, speaker of the house of representatives, state legislators, and the citizens of Massachusetts. This comprehensive document outlines the Office's mission, responsibilities, and key initiatives aimed at enhancing the lives of veterans in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



Office of the Veteran Advocate - Mission and Vision

The OVA was established under Session Law, Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022, underscoring its commitment to ensuring that every veteran receives the highest standard of care, access to comprehensive benefits, and the respect and dignity they deserve. We developed our vision and mission through thoughtful and deliberate consideration of the broad responsibilities specified in this enabling statute.

A year-end snapshot of the OVA includes:

- The status of five full-time priority positions of the core staff needed to meet initially identified responsibilities.
- A listing of key milestones during its first eight months.
- A discussion of FY2024 spending and budget request for FY2025.
- Actions related to advising state legislators on proposals in the HERO Act legislation.

This report also provides a contextual baseline for discussing the veteran population in Massachusetts. Data from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics estimates a population of nearly 274,000 veterans in Massachusetts. This estimate is the midpoint of a continuing decline of approximately 4% annually in the Commonwealth's veteran population. Looking into the future, the percentage of women veterans in the state increases while their total number remains relatively constant.



Responsibilities and Actions

Throughout the fiscal year, the OVA has focused on establishing the office to fulfill its statutory responsibilities. This report outlines actions taken by the OVA in FY2024 and plans to continue its efforts into FY2025 to establish full functionality in the ten numbered responsibilities listed in Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) Chapter 115B.



Issues and Recommendations

While establishing the office and building capacity, the OVA began initial efforts in analyzing strategic issues. The analysis reveals several key areas that warrant attention, including:

- Continue HERO Act Initiatives. The HERO Act amended the definition of veteran in MGL c. 115, aligning it with federal standards, but it still leaves gaps in eligibility for some veteran programs under other chapters of Massachusetts General Laws. Numerous veteran benefits and services fall under the primary definition of "veteran" stated in MGL c. 4, which remains unchanged. The OVA recommends working with legislators to update the foundational definition of a veteran in Chapter 4 to resolve these inconsistencies

- Justice Involved veterans. Veterans incarcerated in Massachusetts may face difficulties accessing physical exams necessary to complete their VA benefits claims, despite the existence of veterans' treatment courts. While federal agreements exist to allow incarcerated veterans to complete claims, the process can be delayed, impacting their transition back to society. The OVA, with assistance, is developing a working group to assess and improve the justice system for veterans, from pretrial to reentry, including recommendations for better access to benefits.

- TRICARE Providers. TRICARE, a health care program for military personnel and veterans, is challenging for many Massachusetts residents to access due to a shortage of participating providers. Recent reports from veterans struggling to find TRICARE providers indicate a systemic issue. The OVA plans to review the availability and status of TRICARE providers in Massachusetts and report on potential issues affecting veterans' health care access.

- Support to Uniformed Service Members and Their Families. Massachusetts lacks a single agency responsible for overseeing programs and services for active service members and their families, as well as facilitating their transition to veteran status. Various agencies have limited responsibilities, but no centralized support or oversight exists for military families in the state. The OVA recommends expanding its mandate to include support for service members and their families, to include funding for these expanded responsibilities.



Conclusion

This report serves not only as a statutory requirement but as a commitment to transparency and accountability to those the Commonwealth serves. The ongoing collaboration with state leaders, agency officials, and the veteran community will be pivotal in achieving our mission. The OVA is dedicated to fostering an environment where veterans are celebrated, supported, and empowered.

We appreciate the dedication of all stakeholders involved and look forward to continued progress in this vital work for our Commonwealth's veterans.

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA)



OVA Seal



OVA Logo

Our Vision

Every veteran in the Commonwealth receives the highest standard of care, enjoys the full spectrum of available benefits, and is treated with unwavering respect and dignity.

Our Mission

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) safeguards the well-being, dignified treatment, rights and benefits of veterans in the care of, or receiving services from the Commonwealth; ensuring these veterans and their families receive compassionate, timely, safe and effective services. OVA collaborates to facilitate access to federal and state benefits and conducts thorough investigations to enhance care and services provided to veterans.

Origins of the OVA

Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022, *AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE GOVERNANCE, STRUCTURE AND CARE OF VETERANS AT THE COMMONWEALTH'S VETERANS' HOMES*, establishes the position of Veteran Advocate and Office of the Veteran Advocate in Chapter 115B of Massachusetts General Laws. Section 2 of this enabling statute establishes the OVA as an independent office charged with multiple responsibilities and reporting requirements to the governor, legislative leaders and the public. This legislation was passed as a response to the tragic COVID-19-related deaths of 77 veterans at the Holyoke Veterans Home.¹

Understanding the OVA

The Office of the Veteran Advocate's broad responsibilities extend from the strategic level of the veteran ecosystem down to direct coordination with municipal veterans' benefits and services officers². Alongside liaising with federal agencies, the OVA liaises and assists state

¹See the May 2021 Report of the Special Joint Oversight Committee on the Soldier's Home in Holyoke COVID-19 Outbreak, <https://malegislature.gov/Commissions/Detail/518/Documents>

² Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 115 and 115B identify several names for municipal appointees that act to disburse veteran benefits, including veterans' agents, veterans' benefits and services officers, veterans service officers, Directors of Veterans' Services Districts, and the Boston Commissioner for veterans' benefits and services. We will use the term veterans' benefits and services officers as defined in MGL Chapter 115, Section 3B(b).

agencies to ensure veterans and their families residing in the Commonwealth are treated humanely and receive benefits and services needed.

Truth to Power. The OVA is also responsible for advising state leadership and the public on how the Commonwealth may improve its veteran-related programs, benefits and services. It does so by system-wide examinations of the care and services provided to veterans and their families. Too often in the veteran space we see opinion or anecdotal examples used to influence public perception or policymakers. The OVA will use peer reviewed research, data, best practices, law, and regulations to evaluate issues and provide trusted recommendations to inform policymakers and the public.

In the event of a fatality or serious injury to a veteran in the care of the Commonwealth, the OVA conducts and reports investigations to state leaders and the public. It is the goal of the Veteran Advocate to build proactive policies, procedures and relationships to prevent serious injury or death from inadequate care from any executive agency.

Building the Office of the Veteran Advocate

OVA Staff on July 1, 2024

Bob Notch – Veteran Advocate

Danielle Dupont – Financial and Administrative Officer

Nathan Dufault – Veteran Safety Advisor

Scott Pitta – General Counsel

Kate Watson – Policy and Research Analyst

Vacant – Communications Specialist³

Vacant (x4) – Regional Liaison (West, Central, Northeast, Southeast)

Vacant – Data and Technology Architect/Analyst

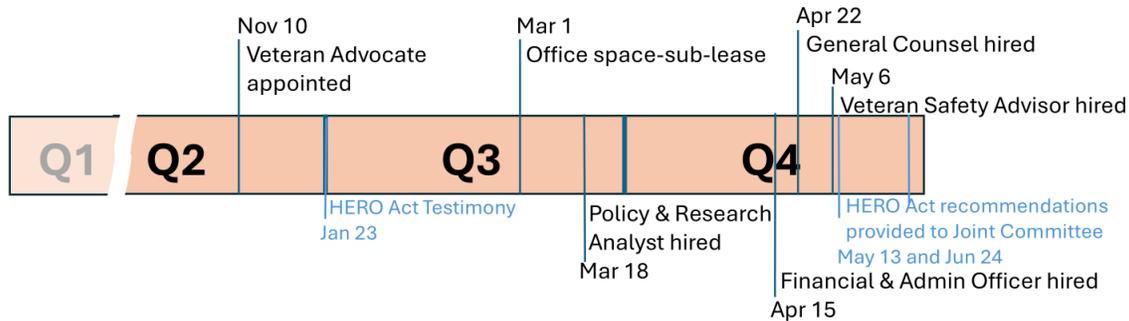
TBD – interns from local colleges and universities

In late November 2023, pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws (MGL) Chapter 115B, Bob Notch was appointed as the Veteran Advocate. Through weekly coordination calls, Interdepartmental Service Agreements and proactive collaboration with representatives from the Governor’s Office, Executive Office for Administration and Finance, Office of the Comptroller and Human Resources Division, the OVA quickly established necessary accounts and initial procedures to begin basic operations. With additional assistance from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Division of Capital Asset Management and Maintenance, and the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security, the OVA

³ Anthony Langone was hired in September 2024 as the Communications Specialist.

established its physical presence through facilities, information technology hardware, and digital services. These agencies were instrumental in establishing basic functionality for the OVA and their support continues at reduced levels into fiscal year 2025 as OVA looks to stabilize long-term operations.

FY2024 Milestones



In addition to establishing basic operational functions of the office, the Veteran Advocate and staff members spent a significant amount of time conducting introductory meetings with elected and appointed leaders across Massachusetts’ state and county government, regional leaders at federal agencies, local veterans’ benefits and services officers, and community groups supporting veterans and their families. Due to the extensive number of stakeholders in the veteran support community, these introductory meetings will continue into FY2025.

Additionally, a significant portion of time was spent in the Massachusetts State House providing information and recommendations regarding elements of the proposed HERO Act⁴. The Veteran Advocate provided verbal and written testimony⁵ during the January 2024 public hearing and the Office provided contextual, research-backed information, advice and recommendations as the bill moved from the House to the Senate and into Conference Committee. It is important to highlight that key staff members have decades of cumulative knowledge and experience working with veterans and their families. An OVA top priority is to build trust and working relationships with elected leaders and their staff members to provide sound advice on issues related to veterans and their families.

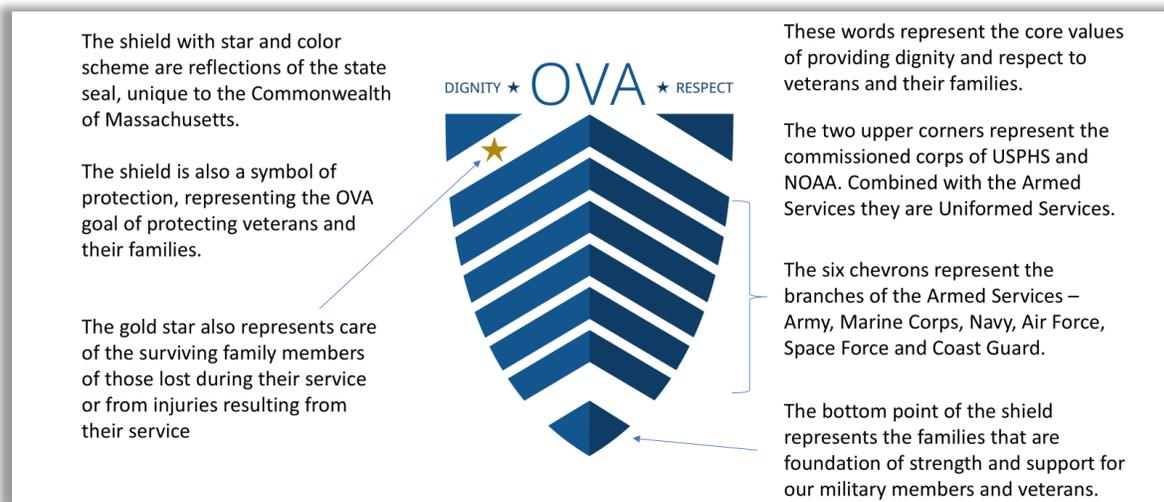
The general appropriation for the OVA in fiscal year 2024 was \$750,000. With the appointment of the Veteran Advocate nearly five months after the fiscal year began and the hiring of initial staff in early spring, the OVA was constrained to affect significant expenditures prior to the end of the fiscal year and was unable to fully utilize all appropriated funds. With a plan in place, the OVA participated in the full budget process for FY2025, resulting in a \$2M appropriation tightly

⁴ AN ACT HONORING, EMPOWERING, AND RECOGNIZING OUR SERVICEMEBERS AND VETERANS, the HERO Act, was signed into law on August 8, 2024.

⁵ See Appendix C for the written testimony

aligned with OVA’s goals to establish an office capable of meeting all of its current statutory requirements by the end of June 2025.

An additional and important element of establishing the Office of the Veteran Advocate was to create a logo as a visual representation of the organization’s identity. Members of the military, both present and past, ascribe value to the symbols surrounding their service. The logo below aligns with OVA’s vision and mission while capturing elements representing the Great Seal of Massachusetts.



A Starting Point - Visualizing Massachusetts’ Veteran Population

The OVA firmly believes that gaining an understanding of the veteran picture in Massachusetts is necessary before making strategic recommendations to improve programs, benefits and services. From initial discussions and reviews of available data, it appears that no state agency or department provides an accurate picture of the veterans in Massachusetts. Most research relies on two federal sources for this information – the US Census Bureau or US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Our analysis of both sources shows a significant difference in estimates, with the VA presenting a larger value. It is important to understand that the VA estimates are anchored in the Census Bureau data, internal source data of VA clients, and Department of Defense transitioned service member data. This cross-reference of sources is designed to account for veterans who move across state lines and those who may not self-report their status to census takers. To maintain a consistent reference point and a preference away from underestimates, OVA will use VA’s National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics data as its standard.

The following veteran information is drawn from the VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics and is a representation of only a few elements of the veteran population in Massachusetts. The OVA will present additional elements of veteran population data in future reports as it pertains to specific issues under review by the office.

273,934

Veterans in Massachusetts³

22,870 (8.3%)

Female Veterans

251,064 (91.7%)

Male Veterans

171,462 (62.6%)

Veterans over the age of 60



MA VetPop 2023 is 273,934⁶ Total MA Pop 7,001,399⁷

Key Observations:

Veterans represent approximately 3.9% of the total population of Massachusetts; one of the smallest minority groups in the state.

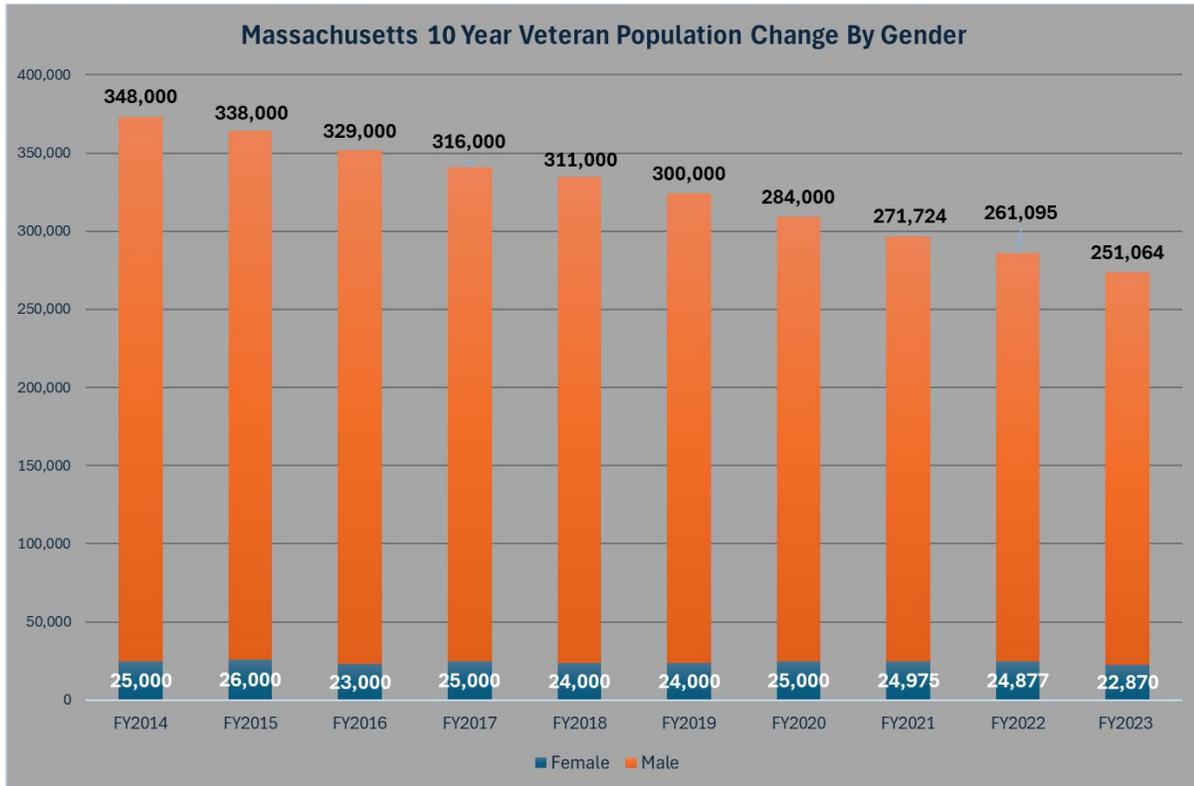
Women who served currently make up less than 10% of the total veteran population in the state. Changes in this population shown in the next two charts are important reference points when discussing the growing presence of women veterans.

Nearly two-thirds of the veterans in Massachusetts also qualify for adult / elder services (age 60+). It is important to note that resources to support veterans or their families may come from sources that are not veteran specific. The OVA has found instances where certain avenues of support were not considered due to a misperception that federal or state veteran services cover all veteran needs.

⁶ VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. The States data, dated 9/30/2023, can be found at https://www.va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp.

⁷ Massachusetts 2023 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates population is found at <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S0101?q=massachusetts>

The next chart depicts the significant changes to the veteran population in Massachusetts over the past ten years. Policy makers should be aware of this significant reduction as it relates to the number of veterans who call Massachusetts “home”.



MA Veteran Population 2014-2023 by Gender⁸

Key Observations:

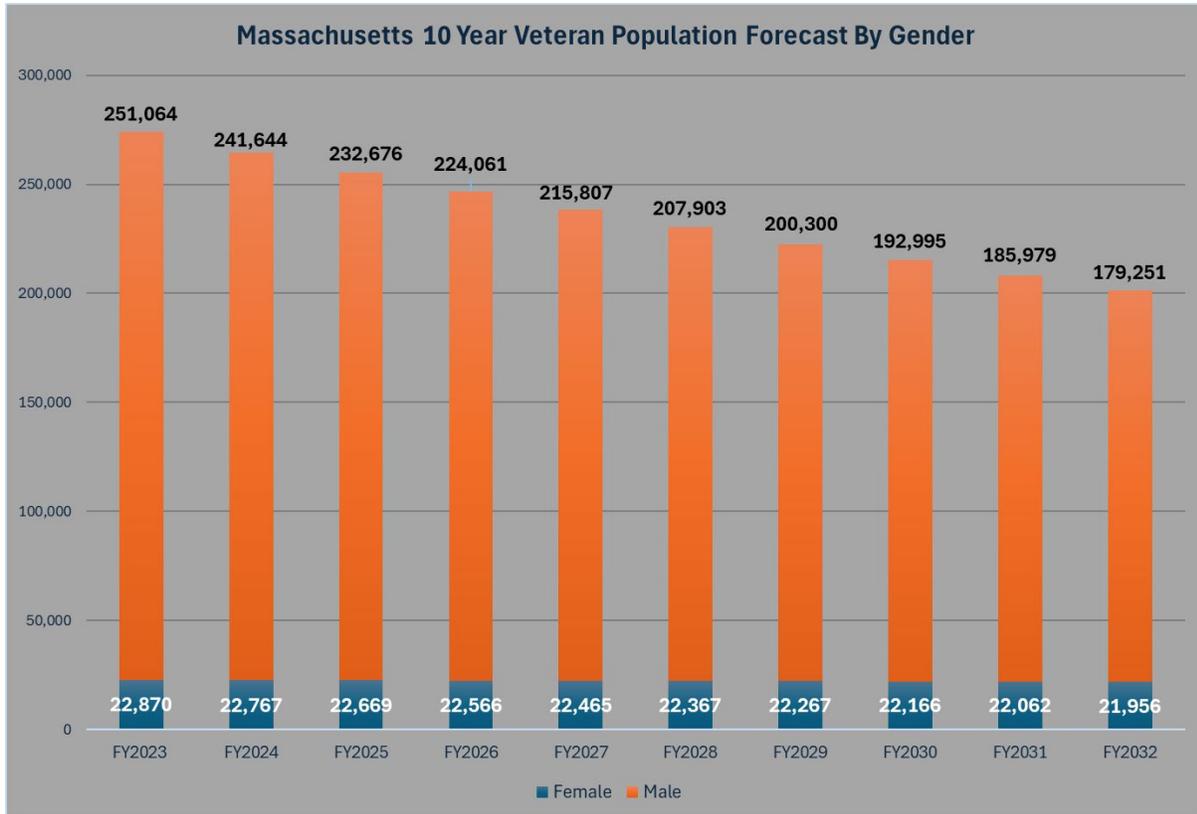
Massachusetts saw a loss of over 99,000 (27%) veterans from 2014 to 2023.

Both the female and male populations declined over the last 10 years. The female veteran population reduced by 2,130 (9%) while the male veteran population reduced by 96,936 (28%).

While the female veteran population declined over this period, their proportion of the total veteran population increased from 6.7% to 8.4%

⁸ VA VetPop 2020 State Estimates 2000 to 2020 is rounded to the nearest 1,000. Data can be found at https://www.data.va.gov/dataset/VetPop2020-State-Estimates-2000-to-2020/fkjq-z6m8/about_data. Following years were provided by the VA National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics per an OVA request.

This last chart shows the predicted continuing decline of the veteran population in Massachusetts. It is important to consider how this decline may impact, among other things, the labor force, the amount of federal dollars entering the state linked to veteran benefits and services, and the demand for state funded benefits and services.



MA Veteran Population 2023-2032 by Gender⁹

Key Observations:

Massachusetts is projected to continue to see a drop in veteran population with a total of 72,727 (27%) fewer veterans from 2023 to 2032.

While the female veteran population remains relatively constant, its representative proportion of the total number of veterans continues to rise – from 8.4% in 2023 to 10.9% in 2032.

The male veteran population remains a continuous decline of approximately 4% each year.

⁹ Population estimates provided by the VA National Center for Veterans Statistics and Analysis.

Responsibilities and FY2024 Actions of the Office of the Veteran Advocate

As a newly created agency establishing itself, the Office of the Veteran Advocate prioritized its efforts to attain capabilities to succeed in the responsibilities designated by the General Court in MGL Chapter 115B. This section is organized to provide an update and future work directly aligned with those responsibilities.

- (i) **ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive humane and dignified treatment at all times, with full respect for the veterans' personal dignity and right to privacy;**
- (ii) **ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive timely, safe and effective services;**

OVA defines “in the care of the commonwealth” as *any situation where someone or something is under the responsibility or guardianship of the government or state. Therefore, when someone is “in the care of the commonwealth,” it means they or their affairs are being managed, overseen, or provided for by the government.*¹⁰

With an understanding that the OVA’s enabling statute is a response to the tragic loss of lives at state veterans homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, it’s clear those homes fall within these first two responsibilities. Yet, in addition to the Veterans Homes at Chelsea and Holyoke, the state operates three hospitals that treat adults, has 16 correctional institutions, 15 county jails, several addiction treatment programs, and numerous other programs run by private entities under contract or grant by the Commonwealth which also host veterans in their care. Any of these organizations fall under the purview of this definition. As the OVA added staff members in the fourth quarter of FY2024, it initiated introductory meetings and began building relationships with state-run facilities and agencies. One result of these visits is an initial veteran census estimate. The following table shows a consolidation of those reports and provides a rough estimate of the “in-residence” population.

Public Facility Type¹¹	Veterans
County and State Correctional Facilities	479
State Hospitals	8
Addiction Treatment Programs	1,591
Chelsea Veterans Home	108
Holyoke Veterans Home	113
TOTAL	2,299

¹⁰ Definition as stated in OVA Regulation 123 CMR 2.00.

¹¹ These facilities have fluctuating populations and the estimate represents a point-in-time count. Many reporting institutions stated this is the first time veteran counts were requested.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Created a staff position titled Veteran Safety Advisor, with responsibilities to build information sharing relationships between the OVA and public or private facilities with responsibility for veterans in their care. The purpose of this position is to provide an independent review of veteran care information and collaborate with providers to take preventive actions to ensure treatment and services meet the directives of Chapter 115B. This position is also responsible for conducting investigations into incidents of serious harm to veterans while in the care of the commonwealth, per section 2(x) of Chapter 115B.
- Toured both Veterans Homes and met with leadership and ombudspersons to conduct initial introductions to OVA and discuss information sharing and potential collaborative efforts to assess the treatment of veterans and veteran access to services. This effort includes an independent review of leading measures of service captured by management.
- Initiated introductory meetings with all other public facilities and agencies responsible for veterans under their care. Key discussion points included establishing information reporting, including routine veteran census counts, and future collaboration.

Priorities for OVA in FY2025

-Complete introductory meetings with public facilities and their managing agencies

-Attend all open meetings related to management of the Veterans Homes and other facilities

-Establish information sharing procedures and investigate methods to automate reporting for near-real-time counts and improved accuracy

-Build data analysis procedures to capture informative observations about the veterans in the care of the Commonwealth

-Identify private facilities that host veterans in the care of the commonwealth and conduct introductory meetings

(iii) aid and coordinate with local veterans service officers to ensure veterans receive all available state and federal benefits;

Municipal veterans' benefits and services officers are a key component of Massachusetts' service and support to veterans and their families. Veterans' benefits and services officers are the front-line agents for the municipality and state, serving veterans near their homes and in their communities. Initial observations of the varying implementations by municipalities indicate support is not equal for all veterans or their respective service officers. Towns with lower populations or less revenue may have limited office hours for veteran services compared to larger cities. Cities and towns consolidated into districts may have greater client workloads that also limit their availability and capacity. The OVA plans to conduct a baseline assessment of Massachusetts' front-line support before developing strategic recommendations for increased fairness and service improvements.

As an initial effort to effectively aid and coordinate with municipal veterans' benefits and services officers, the OVA developed a plan to hire four regional liaisons. These liaisons will not only provide direct support to the veterans' benefits and services officer, but they will also liaise with state and federal agencies within the region to facilitate faster response times to the veteran or family member client through the municipality.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Attended the December meeting of South Shore Veterans' Benefits and Services Officers to introduce the OVA and solicit areas of concern where the OVA could aid and coordinate with their efforts.
- Conducted an introductory meeting with the president and incoming president of the Massachusetts Veterans Service Officers Association, Inc. This meeting highlighted the difference in roles and responsibilities between the OVA and the Executive Office of Veterans Services, reviewed tools and training available to agents/officers, and discussed recurring challenges in serving veterans.
- Participated in local events focused on veterans and their families to facilitate relationship building with local veterans' benefits and services officers, state, and federal agencies, and informally polling veterans and their families regarding challenges to obtain benefits or services.

Priorities for OVA in FY2025

-Establish four Regional Liaisons to provide responsive, regionally focused aid and coordination to veterans' benefits and services officers within the four regions (West, Central, Northeast and Southeast) established by the Massachusetts Veterans Service Officers Association

-Conduct an initial assessment of the veterans' benefits and services officer implementation across all 351 municipalities in Massachusetts and develop recommendations for improvement and equity

-Attend veterans' benefits and services officer training conferences and gatherings to identify where and how the OVA can best aid and coordinate efforts aligned with their support of veterans and their families

(iv) examine, on a system-wide basis, the care and services that executive agencies provide veterans;

As the OVA evaluated this responsibility, it became clear that no singular entity has identified all veteran-related programs, benefits and services across Massachusetts executive agencies. As a related matter, it appears that the Secretary of the Commonwealth has the best accounting of benefits and services stipulated in Massachusetts General Laws¹². As a baseline-establishing measure, the OVA began an independent accounting of these programs, benefits and services. A separate, yet connected process was also initiated to identify which agencies have ownership of a veteran-related program, benefit or service. Once this baseline is established, the OVA can identify gaps, overlaps or neglect within the system. With appropriate data tracking, these systems can be further examined in the future to assess outcomes for those receiving the benefits or services.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Developed a mapping tool to visualize veteran-related programs, benefits and services across state agencies as well as the statutes requiring them.
- Introduced the OVA to many of the agencies providing benefits and services to veterans.

¹² The Veterans' Laws and Benefits guide can be found at <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/cis/veterans/vet-law.htm>

- Created a group in Teams, named *Veterans Roundtable* as a collaborative platform to share insights and information between agencies working with veterans and their family members.
- Initiated a special case study to assess agency capabilities and authorities to assist veterans living in private housing. This issue was initiated by a concerned member of the community and forwarded to the OVA from the Executive Office of Veterans Services. A comprehensive report will be released in FY2025 once the issue has reached a resolution.

Priorities for the OVA in FY2025

-Complete the visualization of agencies with responsibility over programs, benefits and services for veterans and their families

-Complete the accounting and visualization of veteran-related laws

-Publish reports assessing system-wide care and services across executive agencies

(v) advise the public and those at the highest levels of state government about how the commonwealth may improve its services to and for veterans and their families;

The OVA initiated and continued to develop connections and trust between elected leaders and state agencies through the latter part of the fiscal year. While the priority of effort was establishing a strong organizational foundation and growing the staff, the OVA did not have the capacity to build a visible public presence. Initial design work was started on a website earlier in the year however, this effort was given a lower priority to other agency work. With a requested budget secured for FY2025, the OVA will hire a communications specialist to finalize, publish and maintain a webpage and build a social media presence. It is the OVA's goal to use these outlets as a source of useful information to policymakers, veterans, their families and the community of providers that support them.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Reviewed and commented on proposed legislation that impacts veterans and their families, including the HERO Act, the FY2025 budget and other smaller bills. The OVA provided a full review and comment on the HERO Act as it moved from initial filing

through each chamber of the State House and prior to the conference committee completing its efforts.

Priorities for the OVA in FY2025

-Continue to build relationships and trust with legislators and their staff members

-Publish reports on case studies, investigations and research

-Publish a website with transparency on OVA documents and external reports and studies that apply to Massachusetts' veterans and their families

-Establish a social media presence

(vi) develop internal procedures appropriate for the effective performance of the office's duties;

The first section of this report highlights key accomplishments in the initial phase of establishing the Office of the Veteran Advocate. The OVA continues to work with several agencies to ensure policies and procedures are implemented so that the office complies with accepted practices and accountability controls. With the approval of the requested annual budget, the Veteran Advocate is confident the office will remain on schedule to minimally meet current statutory responsibilities by the end of FY2025.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Achieved compliance with annual financial reporting and forecasting processes, internal controls reporting, and statements of financial interest.
- Established Interdepartmental Service Agreements with Human Resources Division, Administration and Finance, and others to employ best practices and ensure a smooth transition to self-support.
- Established internal policies for human resources, telework, finance management and investigations.

- Initiated the process of drafting and filing regulations. The OVA expects publication of regulations in early FY2024¹³.

Priorities for the OVA in FY2025

-Continue to update internal policies manual

-Establish a training program for all employees

- (vii) act as a liaison to all state agencies providing services to veterans to ensure each veteran receives necessary services and care;**
- (viii) assist in developing procedures for the executive agencies to best serve the veteran community;**

As with legislative leaders, the OVA is diligently working to build relationships with state executive offices, their sub-agencies and independent agencies. The early focus is on agencies with direct service programs and responsibilities to deliver benefits and services to veterans and their families. As mentioned earlier, the OVA began efforts to identify and visualize lesser-known agencies with roles in providing support to veterans. Additional connections were established with other independent and support agencies which provided guidance and lessons learned regarding the proper and efficient establishment of a new office.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Established relationships with key members of the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS), Veterans Bonus Division, MassHire, the Supplier Diversity Office, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Comptroller, Inspector General, and the Office of Child Advocate.
- Initiated mapping of state agencies with responsibilities to deliver programs, benefits or services that impact veterans and their families.
- Worked with EOVS, Veterans Bonus Division, and Massachusetts State Police to develop policy and procedures for active-duty deaths.

¹³ The OVA's regulation, 123 CMR 2.00, completed proper filing rules and was published on September 27, 2024.

- Integrated the office within the Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families and efforts to establish a complimentary Suicide Mortality Review process.
- Supported an EOVS policy rewrite to support active military surviving families. The OVA provided input and facilitated meetings with the Department of Defense and the Department of the Navy regarding ways to improve state and local support to surviving family members.
- Initiated a campaign advising state agencies to rephrase a veteran self-identification question that is more likely to generate an accurate response; “Have you served in the US Armed Forces or Uniformed Services?”. For many reasons, veterans are more likely to answer this question.

Priorities for the OVA in FY2025

-Continue to conduct agency introductory meetings and establish collaborative relationships

-Establish four Regional Liaisons to provide responsive coordination with state agencies to support case work of Veterans Service Agents/Officers

-Assist in the development of a common application or agency intake forms that help identify veterans who may be eligible for additional benefits or services

- (ix) act as a liaison to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and all other relevant federal agencies to advocate on behalf of the veterans of the commonwealth;**

Several members of the OVA team arrived with federal agency familiarity and existing veteran-centric relationships with key members of those agencies. These relationships were realigned from previous roles to the Office of the Veteran Advocate through formal informative sessions and less formal correspondence. In some cases, the OVA conducted introductory meetings to establish new lines of communication and working relationships.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Established updated role relationships with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the VA Experience Office (Veterans Resources

Network), the regional Veterans Benefits Administration, VA Vet Centers, VA Boston Health Care, VA Bedford Health Care, the Department of Labor VETS, and the Small Business Administration.

- Established a connection with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Personnel and Readiness; Military Personnel Policy, Officer and Enlisted Personnel Management to request data sharing of voluntary transitioning servicemember information.
- Established a connection with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Personnel and Readiness; Military Community and Family Policy, to address casualty notification improvement and share state benefits for surviving family members.
- Established a collaborative relationship with the Department of Defense-State Liaison Office for New England and supported several priorities that impact veterans who are currently serving in the National Guard and Reserve Components.

Priorities for the OVA in FY2025

-Continue to conduct federal agency introductory meetings and nurture collaborative relationships

-Establish four Regional Liaisons to provide responsive coordination with federal agencies to support case work of Veterans Service Agents/Officers

- (x) investigate incidents where a veteran suffered a fatality, near fatality or serious bodily or emotional injury while receiving services from an executive agency, or circumstances which result in a reasonable belief that an executive agency or a constituent agency failed in its duty to care for a veteran and, as a result, the veteran was at imminent risk of, or suffered serious bodily or emotional injury or death.**

This responsibility is a critical concern for the Veteran Advocate and hiring staff to build capacity was an early priority for the office. As written, this responsibility is a reactive measure to gather information and develop recommendations after a tragedy occurs. The Veteran Advocate believes it is the intent of the General Court for the OVA to be proactive and preventative in its actions. As a result, the position of Veteran Safety Advisor was created. Much like patient safety positions in health care, the responsibilities for this position include building and maintaining collaborative relationships and sharing information with those

agencies caring for veterans to reduce risk and the occurrence of avoidable harm, make error less likely and reduce its impact if it does occur¹⁴.

During FY2024, the OVA accomplished the following:

- Hired a Veteran Safety Advisor, responsible for investigations and preventative coordination.
- Conducted Veteran Safety Advisor introductory meetings, collected initial veteran census data from agencies caring for veterans, and began initial discussions to establish information sharing.
- Developed regulations to define information sharing requirements and reinforce the importance of preventative information sharing.¹⁵

Priorities for the OVA in FY2025

-Continue to develop data sharing processes with state agencies focused on automation to reduce administrative burdens and increase the speed of information flow

-Establish internal investigative policies and procedures

Analysis of Issues and Recommendations

The last half of FY2024 included significant legislative action with the proposal of the HERO Act in January and several reports from concerned individuals which resonated as issues needing further assessment. This section will focus on those issues that have significance to state leadership and the public.

Continue HERO Act Initiatives

Observation. The HERO Act amended the definition of veteran in MGL Chapter 115 to be more inclusive and consistent with the federal definition. While necessary, this change provides only limited inclusion for some veterans within the Commonwealth. The foundational definition of

¹⁴ World Health Organization website, https://www.who.int/health-topics/patient-safety#tab=tab_1

¹⁵ OVA's 123 CMR 2.00, *Investigations, inspections, audits, and reviews* was established prior to the completion of this report.

veteran, found in MGL Chapter 4, Section 7, Clause Forty-third, remains unchanged and is the eligibility requirement for many benefits and services not included in Chapter 115.

Discussion. Through initial research, the OVA has identified at least six locations in MGL where the term veteran is defined¹⁶. All six refer to the definition stated in Chapter 4 and supplement it to varying degrees. Many benefits and services available to veterans are found outside of Chapter 115. Following passage of the HERO Act, the definition misalignment creates situations where veterans are considered eligible for some benefits and services, but not for others. For example, a former commissioned officer of the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps is eligible for all federal benefits and services and post-HERO Act, are eligible to reside in Massachusetts' veterans homes, but they are not eligible for a Massachusetts veteran license plate.

Recommendation. The OVA will work with key stakeholders and legislators to draft a bill that updates the foundational definition of a veteran in chapter 4 of Massachusetts General Law.

Justice Involved Veterans

Observation. Student fellows at the Harvard Legal Services Clinic raised concerns that veterans incarcerated in Massachusetts may not have access to physical examinations to complete their claim for benefits through the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Discussion. Massachusetts has six veterans' treatment courts to help divert eligible veterans from incarceration when warranted. If a veteran is incarcerated, they can apply for VA benefits, yet they may not have access to physical examinations to complete their claim. Completing the veteran claim early in the process allows time for a VA decision prior to reentry to society which can enhance the veteran's transition. At the federal level, the VA and Bureau of Prisons have signed a memorandum of agreement to allow physical examinations to complete the claims process.

Recommendation. The OVA intends to lead a working group with EOVS, Department of Corrections, County Jails and other stakeholders to evaluate the justice system for veterans, from pretrial through reentry to society, and provide recommendations for improvement.

TRICARE Providers

Observation. A TRICARE eligible veteran contacted the OVA and reported that their primary care provider no longer accepts TRICARE health insurance. This veteran has been unable to find

¹⁶ All six definitions can be found in Appendix D.

a provider within a reasonable distance that accepts TRICARE, leaving them extremely limited options or without a provider.

Discussion. TRICARE is a health care program for the US Department of Defense that provides coverage for military personnel, select veterans, and their families. As reported to the OVA, this benefit has proven challenging for many eligible veterans and service members to use due to limited providers accepting the program. Eligible veterans may also choose Uniformed Services Family Health Plan as an alternative program. Steward Health Care, which filed for bankruptcy in May 2024, is a subcontractor managing US Family Health Plan. It is yet unclear how this bankruptcy will impact delivery of this health care benefit to uniformed service members and eligible veterans residing in Massachusetts.

Recommendation. The OVA will conduct a review and report on the availability and status of health care providers for eligible veterans and service members living in Massachusetts using TRICARE or US Family Health Plan.

Support to Uniformed Service Members and Their Families

Observation. Through initial assessments of Massachusetts General Laws, the OVA has identified no agency with directed oversight of programs, benefits and services to service members and their families.

Discussion. Individuals cannot become veterans without first serving as a member of the uniformed services. To best serve transitioning veterans, the commonwealth should provide support to actively serving service members before the transition is complete. MGL does not provide authority to any agency to facilitate a successful service member transition or a single agency to support military families residing in Massachusetts. Several agencies have limited authority to support service members and their families in modest ways. The EOVS has a responsibility to share state civilian licensure and certification requirements with military members; the National Guard has responsibilities to provide benefits and services to its members and their families and to create a military spouse liaison; the Department of Occupational Licensure has responsibilities to assist in professional licensure for military members and their spouses; and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a responsibility for the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission among other matters. As with veterans, a support and oversight role can assist a strategic view of supporting military families as well as developing early transition support.

Recommendation. Expand the OVA's mandate for veterans and their families to include corresponding responsibilities to service members and their families. Include funding to support the expansion of responsibilities.

Conclusion

As members of the Office of the Veteran Advocate conduct introductions and meet veterans and community providers, we are consistently told that this agency is needed. We want to thank the General Court for its foresight to create this first-in-the-nation office. We also thank the following people for their support while OVA established basic capabilities:

Governor's Office - Alex Powell

Executive Office for Administration and Finance - Rick Mikulis

Human Resources Division - Meghan Sisk / Felicia Hopkins

Executive Office of Technology Services and Support – Dennis McEvoy / Darcy Smith

Office of the Comptroller – Thomas Smith-Vaughan

Based on the FY2024 progress in meeting statutory responsibilities and the remaining priorities for FY2025, the OVA is on track for full establishment at minimum capacity by the end of June 2025. In addition to the issues currently under review, the OVA is developing a priority list of other issues for consideration. There is no shortage of work for this office to improve the lives of veterans and their families residing in the Commonwealth.

The OVA intends to bring truth to power, collaborate on improved outcomes, and ensure the commonwealth does its best to serve all veterans. You can expect the office to provide transparency balanced with protecting individual rights of privacy. It is the privilege of OVA staff to work alongside so many leaders and staff members with a passion to best serve Massachusetts' veterans and their families.

We are their voice when they are not heard. We are their presence when they are not seen.

Vox Veteranorum

Appendix A – Glossary and Acronyms

EOVS – Executive Office of Veterans Services in Massachusetts

FYxxxx – fiscal year for Massachusetts government which begins July 1st and ends June 30th. The numbers following FY represent the calendar year of the June end date.

MGL – Massachusetts General Laws

OVA – Office of the Veteran Advocate

VA – US Department of Veterans Affairs

Appendix B – MGL Chapter 115B

Massachusetts General Laws chapter 115B, § 2

There shall be an office of the veteran advocate, which shall be independent of any supervision or control by any executive agency. The office shall:

- (i) ensure that veterans in the **care** of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive humane and dignified treatment at all times, with full **respect** for the veterans' personal **dignity** and right to privacy;
- (ii) ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive timely, safe and effective services;
- (iii) aid and coordinate with local veterans service officers to ensure veterans receive all available state and federal benefits;
- (iv) examine, on a system-wide basis, the care and services that executive agencies provide veterans;
- (v) advise the public and those at the highest levels of state government about how the commonwealth may improve its services to and for veterans and their families;
- (vi) develop internal procedures appropriate for the effective performance of the office's duties;
- (vii) act as a liaison to all state agencies providing services to veterans to ensure each veteran receives necessary services and care;
- (viii) assist in developing procedures for the executive agencies to best **serve** the veteran community;
- (ix) act as a liaison to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and all other relevant federal agencies to advocate on behalf of the veterans of the commonwealth; and
- (x) investigate incidents where a veteran suffered a fatality, near fatality or serious bodily or emotional injury while receiving services from an executive agency, or circumstances which result in a reasonable belief that an executive agency or a constituent agency failed in its **duty** to care for a veteran and, as a result, the veteran was at imminent risk of, or suffered serious bodily or emotional injury or death.

Report annually to the governor, the senate president, the speaker of the house of representatives, the senate and the house committees on ways and means, and the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs on the activities of the office, including, but not limited to,

a. an analysis of the delivery of services to veterans and recommendations for changes in agency procedures which would enable the commonwealth to better provide services to and for veterans and their families and

b. priorities for implementation of those changes to services.

The report shall be made public on the website of the veteran advocate.

Appendix C – OVA HERO Act Written Testimony



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE VETERAN ADVOCATE

January 23, 2024

The Honorable John C. Velis
24 Beacon St., Room 513
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Gerard J. Cassidy
24 Beacon St., Room 171
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Velis and Cassidy,

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) submits this testimony in support of H.4172, *An Act Honoring, Empowering, and Recognizing Our Servicemembers and Veterans*. This support also extends to bills S.1750, H.2627, and H.2662, all titled, *An Act relative to veterans' buyback*. In addition to modernizing and aligning language to existing definitions and references, these bills propose significant changes that will extend benefits and services to improve the lives of veterans and their families in the commonwealth.

The Office of the Veteran Advocate offers the following additional recommendations to complement the clarity, federal alignment, and inclusivity intent of H.4172.

1. Amend clause Forty-third, section 7 of chapter 4, of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, by striking out the term "Veteran" and inserting in place thereof the following definition:-

Forty-third, "Veteran" shall mean (1) any person, (a) whose last discharge or release from their wartime service as defined herein, was under honorable conditions and who (b) served in the army, marine corps, navy, air force, space force, coast guard, commissioned corps of the public health service or commissioned corps of the national oceanic and atmospheric administration of the United States, or on full time national guard duty under Titles 10 or 32 of the United States Code or under sections 38, 40 and 41 of chapter 33 for not less than 90 days active service, at least 1 day of which was for wartime service; provided, however, than any person who so served in wartime and was awarded a service-connected disability or a Purple Heart, or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding their failure to complete 90 days of active service; (2) a member of the American Merchant Marine who served in armed conflict between December 7, 1941 and December 31, 1946, and who has received honorable discharges from the United States Coast Guard, Army, or Navy; (3) any person (a) whose last discharge from active service was under honorable conditions, and who (b) served in the army, marine corps, navy, air force, space force, coast guard, commissioned corps of the public health service, or

commissioned corps of the national oceanic and atmospheric administration of the United States for not less than 180 days active service; provided, however, that any person who so served and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding their failure to complete 180 days of active service.

Amend subsection Forty-third (e), section 7 of chapter 4, of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, by striking out the term "Armed forces" and inserting in place thereof the following definition:- "Armed forces" shall include army, marine corps, navy, air force, space force and coast guard, including reserve components thereof.

Amend subsection Forty-third (e), of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, by inserting after line 444:- "Uniformed services" shall include armed forces, commissioned corps of the public health service and commissioned corps of the national oceanic and atmospheric administration.

Rationale: These recommendations align the definition of veteran in 10 USC, Section 101 used by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and enhances continuity of benefits and services between federal and state agencies. It also sustains equal eligibility for veteran services and benefits under separate chapters of M.G.L. referencing this definition. According to the Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service, current Massachusetts population estimates for the two commissioned corps totals less than 200.

2. This change also necessitates a review of additional portions of General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, where the less inclusive term "armed forces" is used. In these cases, replace "armed forces" with the term "uniformed services" to best align with definitions in U.S. Code.

Rationale: This opens opportunities (e.g. veterans service agent and veterans graves officer) and benefits (e.g. annuities, veterans homes and veterans bonus) to uniformed services veterans that are otherwise excluded by the term armed forces.

3. Throughout chapter 115 of General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, replace "Veterans' Administration of the United States government" with "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs".

Rationale. This updates M.G.L to the current agency name.

4. In addition to the changes stated in lines 484-487 of H.4172, corresponding text should result in - chairs of the boards of trustees of the veterans' homes.

Rationale. Clarifies that each veterans' home chair of the board of trustees is included in the nominating committee.

The Office of the Veteran Advocate is committed to advising you and the public about how the commonwealth may improve its services for veterans and their families and is prepared to liaison with federal and state executive agencies to best serve this community. Please reach out to me with any questions. I welcome the opportunity to assist in identifying additional areas of improvement for veterans and their families.



Robert Notch
Veteran Advocate

Appendix D – Definitions of Veteran in Massachusetts General Laws

Chapter 4, Section 7, Clause Forty-third

Forty-third, "Veteran" shall mean (1) any person, (a) whose last discharge or release from his wartime service as defined herein, was under honorable conditions and who (b) served in the army, navy, marine corps, coast guard, or air force of the United States, or on full time national guard duty under Titles 10 or 32 of the United States Code or under sections 38, 40 and 41 of chapter 33 for not less than 90 days active service, at least 1 day of which was for wartime service; provided, however, than any person who so served in wartime and was awarded a service-connected disability or a Purple Heart, or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete 90 days of active service; (2) a member of the American Merchant Marine who served in armed conflict between December 7, 1941 and December 31, 1946, and who has received honorable discharges from the United States Coast Guard, Army, or Navy; (3) any person (a) whose last discharge from active service was under honorable conditions, and who (b) served in the army, navy, marine corps, coast guard, or air force of the United States for not less than 180 days active service; provided, however, that any person who so served and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete 180 days of active service.

"Wartime service" shall mean service performed by a "Spanish War veteran", a "World War I veteran", a "World War II veteran", a "Korean veteran", a "Vietnam veteran", a "Lebanese peace keeping force veteran", a "Grenada rescue mission veteran", a "Panamanian intervention force veteran", a "Persian Gulf veteran", or a member of the "WAAC" as defined in this clause during any of the periods of time described herein or for which such medals described below are awarded.

"Spanish War veteran" shall mean any veteran who performed such wartime service between February fifteenth, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight and July fourth, nineteen hundred and two.

"World War I veteran" shall mean any veteran who (a) performed such wartime service between April sixth, nineteen hundred and seventeen and November eleventh, nineteen hundred and eighteen, or (b) has been awarded the World War I Victory Medal, or (c) performed such service between March twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and seventeen and August fifth, nineteen hundred and seventeen, as a Massachusetts National Guardsman.

"World War II veteran" shall mean any veteran who performed such wartime service between September 16, 1940 and July 25, 1947, and was awarded a World War II Victory Medal, except that for the purposes of chapter 31 it shall mean all active service between the dates of September 16, 1940 and June 25, 1950.

"Korean veteran" shall mean any veteran who performed such wartime service between June twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and fifty and January thirty-first, nineteen hundred and fifty-five, both dates inclusive, and any person who has received the Korea Defense Service Medal as established in the Bob Stump National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2003.

"Korean emergency" shall mean the period between June twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and fifty and January thirty-first, nineteen hundred and fifty-five, both dates inclusive.

"Vietnam veteran" shall mean (1) any person who performed such wartime service during the period commencing August fifth, nineteen hundred and sixty-four and ending on May seventh, nineteen hundred and seventy-five, both dates inclusive, or (2) any person who served at least one hundred and eighty days of active service in the armed forces of the United States during the period between February first, nineteen hundred and fifty-five and August fourth, nineteen hundred and sixty-four; provided, however, that for the purposes of the application of the provisions of chapter thirty-one, it shall also include all active service between the dates May seventh, nineteen hundred and seventy-five and June fourth, nineteen hundred and seventy-six; and provided, further, that any such person who served in said armed forces during said period and was awarded a service-connected disability or a Purple Heart, or who died in said service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be deemed to be a veteran notwithstanding his failure to complete one hundred and eighty days of active service.

"Lebanese peace keeping force veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service and received a campaign medal for such service during the period commencing August twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and eighty-two and ending when the President of the United States shall have withdrawn armed forces from the country of Lebanon.

"Grenada rescue mission veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service and received a campaign medal for such service during the period commencing October twenty-fifth, nineteen hundred and eighty-three to December fifteenth, nineteen hundred and eighty-three, inclusive.

"Panamanian intervention force veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service and received a campaign medal for such service during the period commencing December twentieth, nineteen hundred and eighty-nine and ending January thirty-first, nineteen hundred and ninety.

"Persian Gulf veteran" shall mean any person who performed such wartime service during the period commencing August second, nineteen hundred and ninety and ending on a date to be determined by presidential proclamation or executive order and concurrent resolution of the Congress of the United States.

"WAAC" shall mean any woman who was discharged and so served in any corps or unit of the United States established for the purpose of enabling women to serve with, or as auxiliary to, the armed forces of the United States and such woman shall be deemed to be a veteran.

None of the following shall be deemed to be a "veteran":

(a) Any person who at the time of entering into the armed forces of the United States had declared his intention to become a subject or citizen of the United States and withdrew his intention under the provisions of the act of Congress approved July ninth, nineteen hundred and eighteen.

(b) Any person who was discharged from the said armed forces on his own application or solicitation by reason of his being an enemy alien.

(c) Any person who has been proved guilty of willful desertion.

(d) Any person whose only service in the armed forces of the United States consists of his service as a member of the coast guard auxiliary or as a temporary member of the coast guard reserve, or both.

(e) Any person whose last discharge or release from the armed forces is dishonorable.

"Armed forces" shall include army, navy, marine corps, air force and coast guard.

"Active service in the armed forces", as used in this clause shall not include active duty for training in the army national guard or air national guard or active duty for training as a reservist in the armed forces of the United States.

Chapter 15E, Section 1

"Veteran", a person who served in the uniformed services and who was discharged or released from service under conditions other than dishonorable.

Chapter 31, Section 1

"Veteran", any person who:

(1) comes within the definition of a veteran appearing in the forty-third clause of section seven of chapter four; or,

(2) comes within such definition except that instead of having performed "wartime service" as defined therein, he has been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor or one of the following campaign badges: Second Nicaraguan Campaign, Yangtze Service, Navy Occupation Service, Army of Occupation or Medal for Humane Action; or,

(3) is a person eligible to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor or one of the campaign badges enumerated in clause (2) of this paragraph and who presents proof of such eligibility which is satisfactory to the administrator.

A veteran shall not include active duty for training in the army national guard or air national guard or active duty for training as a reservist in the armed forces of the United States.

"Wartime service", the same meaning as specified in the forty-third clause of section seven of chapter four, or active service in the armed forces of the United States in any campaign for which an award was made of any of the campaign badges enumerated in the definition of "veteran" in this section.

Chapter 32, Section 1

"Veteran", any person who (a) is a veteran as defined in clause Forty-third of section seven of chapter four; or (b) meets all the requirements of said clause Forty-third except that instead of performing wartime service as so defined he has been awarded one of the campaign badges enumerated in the definition of "Veteran" in section one of chapter thirty-one; or (c) meets all the requirements of said clause Forty-third except that instead of performing ninety days' active service, including ten days' wartime service, he has performed active service in the armed forces of the United States at any time between April sixth, nineteen hundred and seventeen and November eleventh, nineteen hundred and eighteen, inclusive.

Chapter 115, Section 1 (as amended by the HERO Act on August 8, 2024)

"Veteran", any person who (a) is a veteran as defined in clause Forty-third of section 7 of chapter 4; or (b) served on active duty in the armed forces for at least 90 days and whose last discharge or release was under conditions other than dishonorable; or (c) served on active duty, to include active duty solely for training purposes, in the armed forces, and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable; or (d) served in the national guard or as a reservist in any branch of the armed forces, including active duty solely for training purposes, and was awarded a service-connected disability or who died in such service under conditions other than dishonorable; or (e) is determined to be a veteran according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; provided, that in any case, the service of such person qualified under clause (a) through clause (e) was entered into or served in Massachusetts, or such person has resided in the commonwealth for 1 day, except for the purpose of determining the residential eligibility of a deceased veteran's dependents.

Chapter 121B, Section 1

"Veteran", any person who is a veteran as defined in clause Forty-third of section seven of chapter four. The word "veteran" as used herein shall also include the spouse, surviving spouse, parent or other dependent of such person.