

Office of the Veteran Advocate
Testimony to the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal
Affairs
July 22, 2025

**Supporting H3872 and S2466 - An Act expanding the mission of
the Office of the Veteran Advocate**

Good afternoon. Thank you Chairs Velis and McGonagle and members of the Joint Committee on Veterans & Federal Affairs for inviting our testimony today **in support of bills H3872 & S2466, “An Act expanding the mission of the Office of the Veteran Advocate.”**

I am Bob Notch, it is my honor to serve Commonwealth residents, particularly veterans and their families, as the Veteran Advocate.

Massachusetts is home to approximately 255,000 veterans, including some currently serving military members of the National Guard and Reserve, who have chosen this state as their current or post-military home. While we are all aware of the strong Guard and Reserve components, which number near 14,000 individuals in Massachusetts, there are also over 3,500 active-duty service personnel of all military branches, many with families, who are stationed in Massachusetts without a common coordinating agency to address the full spectrum of their challenges and needs. The Office of the Veteran Advocate agrees it is a natural extension of our mission to include strategic support to service members and their families.

Adopting actively serving families into our mission optimizes our existing strategic relationships with the federal departments of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Labor, and the

Small Business Administration, along with our developing relationships with the Departments of Education and Agriculture; all codified in Chapter 115B. Expanding the OVA's scope of responsibility in these relationships could simplify coordination to a single office through which to channel policy, ensure that the continuum of military and veteran needs are addressed, and to integrate the efforts of the various agencies who have limited responsibilities to both communities.

One of the gaps that these bills address – the one we believe is the most important – is transition support. Transition is that process – one that really has no specified end – when service personnel begin the process of moving from the often controlled and insulated military environment into the civilian world of unlimited opportunities. The military world IS significantly different and the Office of the Veteran Advocate “gets it.”

While that transition “shift” may sound inconsequential, scholars report that “the period immediately following separation from the military, often referred to as a 'deadly gap', presents heightened risks due to limited access to psychiatric services and increased suicide risk factors. This vulnerability could persist for years after the end of military service. Addressing transition before the servicemember receives their separation papers can aid in reducing the needs of veterans during the deadly gap and later in their lives.

Aside from our deep experiential and intellectual understanding of transition, we also believe that integrating servicemembers and their families into a collaborative strategic vision across state agencies substantially contributes to the strength of the Massachusetts Military Asset & Security Strategy Task Force (MASS-TF). The Task Force is the primary vehicle for sustaining, and hopefully increasing, federal military investment in the

Commonwealth. Sustainment of installations and systems relies heavily on qualified personnel and opportunities for military family members. Specific focus on military families provided by these bills may facilitate continued confidence in the investments by the military services

We believe it is in the best interest of the Commonwealth to keep or draw service members and their families here; to make Massachusetts their home of choice. That would be a welcome change. Right now, the Army's Soldier for Life program reports that 70% of those recruited into the Army from Massachusetts are not returning to Massachusetts. It's time to turn that around; to retain and recruit military talent back to Massachusetts. To provide skilled candidates for Massachusetts high-tech and medical professions. According to the Institute for Veterans & Military Families at Syracuse University, transitioning military members are promoted faster, perform better and are easier to manage than their non-veteran peers. These bills provide Massachusetts the opportunity to serve as the anchor, the conduit and the champion of the actively serving military and those in transition.

I want to take a minute to thank Senators Fattman, Cronin and Tarr as well as Representatives Pease, Gallagher and Meschino for their trust and confidence in the Office of the Veteran Advocate to fulfill the responsibilities proposed by these bills.

I ask that you report favorably to advance H3872 and S2466.