

Office of the Veteran Advocate
Testimony to the Joint Committee on Transportation
July 22, 2025

**Supporting H4088 - An Act relative to a commission to
redetermine the definition of disabled veteran in the laws and
regulations for the registry of motor vehicles**

Good afternoon. Thank you Chairs Arciero and Crighton, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation for inviting our testimony today **in support of H4088**

I am Bob Notch, the Veteran Advocate for the Commonwealth, a position created in 2022 in M.G.L. Chapter 115B. Since my appointment in late November 2023, I have been building the Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) and, as part of our statutory responsibilities, we are following both RMV and Transportation issues as they impact veterans. While today is my first appearance before this committee, I expect it will not be my last.

For approximately 80 years, the Commonwealth has recognized the value of our service members by affording them veteran and disabled veteran license plates. A subsection, about 25% of the Massachusetts veteran population -- nearly 66,000 -- are veterans rated for a service-connected disability by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), ranging from 0 to 100%.

Massachusetts General Law, Chapter 90, Section 2, Paragraph 7, uses the following language to define disabled veterans:

“veterans who,

- have a service-connected disability rating of 60 per cent or greater
- loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet;
- loss or permanent loss of use of one or both hands;
- permanent impairment of vision of both eyes (with further delineation of visual acuity – corrected and uncorrected

After extensive research, our office has not found this language in Federal Law or regulations as a definition of “disabled veteran.” Rather, this language appears as a description of VA’s designation of a unique disability compensation category set aside for the most severely disabled: Special Monthly Compensation – examples of text are “ ... a monthly benefit for veterans with severe service-connected conditions, such as loss of use of limbs or vision impairment, and those requiring significant aid and attendance.” Current application of that language by VA includes: “total blindness and deafness in one ear ..., a double-leg amputee needing daily care ..., or a veteran with Parkinson's and PTSD” Again, this is not an accurate nor adequate definition of a disabled veteran, only the characteristics of Special Monthly Compensation.

Advances in modern military medicine and rapid battlefield transportation have dramatically decreased field death rates and subsequently moved many more wounded warriors back into civilian life, some with apparent physical injuries and more recently, recognition and diagnosis of invisible wounds such as Post-Traumatic Stress, Traumatic

Brain Injuries, and cancers - to name a few. These invisible wounds are currently missing from the definition in Chapter 90.

Now is the time to review and address the language Massachusetts uses to define a disabled veteran. I am willing and look forward to accepting responsibility as co-chair for this endeavor.

Our recent conversations with the Registry of Motor Vehicles lead us to believe they would not be opposed to their role and creation of this commission.

I ask the Committee to favorably report H4088.