

An American flag is shown in the foreground, slightly out of focus, with its stars and stripes clearly visible. In the background, a building with white columns and a pediment is visible, also slightly out of focus. The entire image has a dark blue overlay.

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES

THE  
**BLUF**

Bottom Line Up Front

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OFFICE OF ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH  
QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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SUMMER 2025



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# A Message from the Assistant Secretary

# W

elcome to our

summer edition of the BLUF Newsletter. We created this resource to keep you informed of the latest updates from the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) and to share important tools and information to support your work.

The summer months bring several key dates that honor the service and sacrifice of our nation's veterans. On July 4, we celebrated Independence Day—a time to reflect on the founding values of freedom, democracy, and the spirit of service that continues to define our country.

**Whether you're navigating benefits, supporting families, or strengthening outreach, your work makes a difference every single day.**

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Later this month, we observe National Korean War Armistice Day on July 27, marking the 1953 ceasefire that ended active combat in Korea. This solemn day honors the courage and resolve of those who served in one of the most difficult conflicts of the 20th century.

We recognize Purple Heart Day on August 7, a day that pays tribute to service members wounded or killed in action—reminding us of the personal cost of military service.

Each of these commemorations reflects the enduring legacy of

those who serve and the values we continue to uphold together.

To all of you—our VSOs and community partners—thank you. Your dedication, compassion, and leadership are visible in every life you touch. Whether you're navigating benefits, supporting families, or strengthening outreach, your work makes a difference every single day.

It's an honor to serve alongside you in this mission.



**Cory R. Ahonen**  
Assistant Secretary for  
Engagement & Outreach





# QUARTERLY RECAP





**Service is not just  
a word in  
Massachusetts—  
it's a way of life.**

**Jon Santiago**  
Secretary, Executive Office  
of Veterans Services



2025 Inaugural Military Appreciation Day Class posed with nominating elected officials, Governor Maura Healey, First Lady Joanna Lydgate, Veterans Services Secretary Jon Santiago and more

# EOVS Hosts Inaugural Military Appreciation Day at Massachusetts State House

On May 22, 2025, the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) hosted the Commonwealth's first-ever Military Appreciation Day at the Massachusetts State House—an event created to recognize the service and sacrifice of currently serving military members and their families across the Commonwealth.

Governor Maura Healey, Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, and Secretary Jon Santiago joined state legislators, agency leaders, and military families to honor over 130 service members nominated for their exceptional commitment to duty and community. The program included remarks by General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., 19th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and culminated in the presentation of a custom Military Appreciation Day challenge coin to each honoree.

Military Appreciation Day is now an annual event—created by the Healey-Driscoll Administration to shine a light on the service of our military and strengthen the bridge between the veteran and military communities.





**We don't do this work for recognition, we do it because we remember what it felt like to be unseen, unheard, and uncertain.**

**Ashley Booker, 2025 Deborah Sampson Award Recipient**



Pictured, right to left: First Lady Joanna Lydgate, Deputy Secretary Andrea Gayle-Bennett, Ashley Booker, Mary-Dith-Tuitt, WVN Director Jessica Frost

# Honoring the Legacy of Service: Celebrating Women Veterans Across Massachusetts

This spring, EOVS proudly hosted a series of events to honor the service, sacrifice, and leadership of women veterans across the Commonwealth. In May, the 17th Annual Women Veterans Network Conference brought together hundreds of veterans for a day of workshops, wellness, and networking under the theme “Legacy of Service.” In June, the Commonwealth celebrated Women Veterans Recognition Day by presenting the 2025 Deborah Sampson Award to Navy veteran Ashley Booker at a special State House ceremony featuring remarks by First Lady Joanna Lydgate Deputy Secretary Andrea Gayle-Bennett. Booker, a trailblazer aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower, was honored for her continued advocacy and impact.

That same week, women veterans gathered in Worcester for a luncheon hosted by EOVS, featuring keynote speaker Robin Lovelle Seymour and celebrating the strength, resilience, and sisterhood of Massachusetts’ women veterans.





**Our duty now is  
to remember  
them, to honor  
them, and to  
ensure their  
legacy lives on.**

**Jon Santiago  
Secretary, Executive Office  
of Veterans Services**



Governor Maura Healey commemorating Memorial Day 2025

# **Honoring Our Fallen: Memorial Day 2025**

EOVS marked Memorial Day by leading meaningful tributes at the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemeteries in Agawam and Winchendon, where veterans, families, and local leaders gathered to hear remarks, observe rifle salutes, and listen to the echo of Taps across the grounds. In the days leading up to each ceremony, dedicated volunteers joined cemetery staff to place American flags at every gravesite.

**Thank you to our incredible cemetery staff, volunteers, and community partners for helping us “Honorably Serve Those Who Have Served Us.”**





**We're not just  
building units  
— we're  
building a  
future.**

**Ed Augustus  
Secretary, Housing &  
Livable Communities**



Representative Joseph McGonagle, Veterans Services Secretary Jon Santiago, Deputy Secretary Andrea Gayle-Bennett, Soldier On CEO Bruce Buckley, Housing and Livable Communities Secretary Ed Augustus, Senator Finegold, Representative Robertson, and Shane Harrington

# Building a Brighter Future for the Veteran Community

EOVS continues to celebrate major milestones in our initiative to end veteran homelessness across Massachusetts, including ribbon cuttings of new housing facilities in Tewksbury and Devens, Brighton Marine, and the opening of a new transitional home in New Bedford. There are 330 veteran housing units slated for development in 2025.

To learn more about our end veteran homelessness campaign, please visit:  
**<https://www.mass.gov/end-veteran-homelessness-one-year-of-progress>**.





**The enthusiasm for MA250 is visible all across the state, with exciting events and exhibitions happening every day.**

**Governor Maura Healey**



Governor Maura Healey at the celebration of the 250th anniversary of Paul Revere's midnight ride

# Mass250 Celebrations Around the Commonwealth

Massachusetts proudly kicked off its MA250 commemorations with a series of historic events honoring the Commonwealth's central role in the birth of our nation. From the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill in Charlestown to the U.S. Marine Corps' 250th anniversary, remembrance is being felt state To get involved in our state's Semiquincentennial events, please visit <https://massachusetts250.org/>.





# Celebrate MA250

# Join the Revolution!

## **Celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution with DCR**

Throughout 2025 and 2026, DCR proudly commemorates the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution and the crucial role Massachusetts' state parks played in the fight for independence.

### **Start Your Own Revolution!**

Honor the revolution by completing any two of the activities to the right and earn a special MA250 sticker!

### **Discover Historic DCR Sites & Events**

Scan the QR code to explore highlighted DCR properties connected to the American Revolution and to learn about upcoming events.



**Scan here to claim your sticker and be entered for a grand prize!**

**[mass.gov/dcr](https://mass.gov/dcr)**





# Summer Updates





# EOVS Staff Spotlight:

## Tom LaRose, *Director*

### *Veterans Employment, Education, and Training Program*



**A**t the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS), we believe service doesn't end when the uniform comes off—and no one embodies that more than Tom LaRose, Director of the Veterans Employment, Education, and Training (VEET) Program.

Since stepping into the director role in September 2024, Tom has helped drive VEET's mission: empowering veterans to thrive in civilian life through meaningful career pathways, higher education opportunities, and business development support. Under his leadership, the program has expanded outreach, strengthened partnerships, and made it easier for veterans to connect with the tools they need to succeed.

Whether a veteran is pursuing a college degree, exploring a new industry, or launching a business of their own, VEET stands ready to support that journey. The program's three core pillars include:

**Veteran Ready Business (VRB) Program** – Encouraging employers to hire and retain veterans by offering training, tax incentives, and access to exclusive veteran hiring events. Dozens of employers have become certified VRBs, helping to build a stronger, more inclusive workforce across the Commonwealth.

**Employment, Education & Training (EET) Referral System** – A streamlined pathway connecting veterans directly to job opportunities and resources. This integrated system works across EOVS, local Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), and MassHire Career Centers to ensure no veteran falls through the cracks.

**Student Veteran Council (SVC)** – A statewide leadership initiative that elevates the voices of student veterans on 16 campuses. These 25 students provide direct feedback to EOVS, organize service projects, and

strengthen the support systems available to veterans in higher education.

Tom brings both professional expertise and lived experience to this work. A U.S. Army veteran and former Armor Officer with the 1st Cavalry, 5th Regiment at Fort Cavazos, TX, he knows firsthand the challenges of transition—and the importance of having someone in your corner. Before joining EOVS in January 2024, Tom worked in Boston's historical and museum sector, including roles at the USS Constitution Museum, Old North Church, and Revolutionary Spaces. He holds a B.A. in History from Clark University and an M.A. in Public History from Northeastern.

Outside of work, Tom enjoys wildlife photography, trying new restaurants with his fiancée, and staying active. But his focus remains clear: helping fellow veterans build the future they've earned.

**"I take great pride in helping veterans access the education and employment resources they need to build meaningful, successful second careers—whether they served for 30 days or 30 years."**

For more information on the VEET program, visit [mass.gov/VEET](https://mass.gov/VEET)



# Veteran Education Employment Training Program (VEET)

*Building Veteran Care, One Connection at a Time*

Through our Veteran Engagement, Employment, and Training (VEET) Program, we're helping veterans chart their next chapter—whether it's through career coaching, business connections, or educational pathways.



Learn more about our **Veteran Ready Business (VRB)** network and **Student Veteran Council (SVC)**, two initiatives designed to empower veterans in the workplace and on campus.



## Veteran Ready Business (VRB)

**Get VRB certified!** This program aims to educate businesses across the state about the value of hiring and retaining veterans and spouses.

**Join the 18 businesses that have already certified!**

## Student Veterans Council (SVC)

**Join the SVC!** This group of engaged and proactive leaders seek to improve the educational experience for their fellow veterans and continues to serve their community.

**To learn more visit:**  
[mass.gov/VEET](https://mass.gov/VEET)





# EOVS Programs and Services

## **Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemeteries at Agawam and Winchendon**

### **Congratulations to the Massachusetts Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Winchendon!**

Following a recent site inspection by the National Cemeteries Administration, the preliminary report was overwhelmingly positive—surpassing last year’s evaluation.

This success reflects the dedication and hard work of the team who cares for the grounds and uphold the honor of our veterans every day.



**For more information, visit:  
[mass.gov/MVMC](https://mass.gov/MVMC)**



# Statewide Advocacy for Veterans Empowerment (SAVE) & Supporting and Empowering Reintegration for Veterans Equality (SERVE) Programs

## New Training Opportunity: Promoting Lethal Means Safety in Veteran Communities

In June, the SAVE and SERVE teams rolled out a series of virtual and in-person trainings focused on reducing risk and promoting responsible firearm storage. All participants receive free safety items, including cable locks, trigger locks, and gun safes.



## Upcoming Trainings:

**August 6, 2025**

**10 AM - 3 PM**

Marlborough American Legion  
90 Maple Street  
Marlborough, MA 01752

**September 11, 2025**

**10 AM - 3 PM**

Holbrook Sportsmen's Club  
150 Quincy Street  
Holbrook, MA 02343

**October 10, 2025**

**10 AM - 3 PM**

Ames Pistol and Rifle Club  
128 Canton Street #R  
North Easton, MA 02356

**RSVP at [mass.gov/SAVE](https://mass.gov/SAVE)**

*This effort is part of a partnership with the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security,  
funded through the Byrne Suicide Crisis Intervention Program*



# MassVets: Veteran State Financial Benefits



For the first time in 17 years, eligible 100% disabled veterans, Gold Star parents, and Gold Star spouses are receiving an increase to the state's annual annuity benefit.

**Starting August 2025, the full \$2,500 annual benefit will be distributed each year moving forward.**

## EOVS Veteran Benefit Estimator

DISCOVER WHAT MASSACHUSETTS CAN DO FOR YOU

Visit [vets.mass.gov](https://vets.mass.gov) for more information



# Active–Duty Military Buyback for State Employees

## Deadline to Apply: August 8, 2025

If you've served and are enrolled in the Massachusetts State Employees' Retirement System (MSERS), you may purchase up to four years of military service credit under the HERO Act.

### Who's Eligible?

To qualify, you must meet the definition of a veteran state law, which includes:

- 180+ days of active duty with an honorable discharge
- 90+ days of active duty with at least one day served during wartime

### What Does It Cost?

- 10% of your starting MSERS salary per year of credit
- Flexible payment options — pay in full or through an installment plan



Apply at [mass.gov/retirement](https://mass.gov/retirement)





# Women Veterans Network

## *Program Interest Survey*

Your opinion matters! Help the WVN plan for this year's upcoming events and offerings by sharing your feedback in a short survey!



Scan the code to begin  
the WVN survey!



Survey Link:  
[bit.ly/44k5NYE](https://bit.ly/44k5NYE)

Complete the survey by **August 29** for a chance to win a spa basket or other raffle prizes!



# Honoring Veteran Achievements

Did you know? EOVS offers  
official recognition for  
veterans' special milestones  
and achievements!

## Awards & Citations

*Whether it's a birthday, retirement, promotion, or other significant occasion, you  
can request a citation or certificate of achievement.*

### Certificate of Appreciation

- For exceptional service or support to veterans over a significant period



### Certificate of Achievement

- Outstanding achievements that have advanced veterans services/welfare
- Outstanding services or deeds that surpass "Certificate of Appreciation"

### Veteran Service Citation

- Birthdays over 100
- Couples celebrating their 50th or later wedding anniversary
- Retirements (including military service)
- Outstanding services or deeds that surpass a "Certificate of Achievement"

To formally make a request, please visit:

[Mass.gov/EOVS-Citation](https://www.mass.gov/EOVS-Citation)

*Please make your request at least 21 business days prior to the deadline*

*(All Requests are Subject to Review)*





*Do you know an unsung hero serving veterans?*

**Help us spotlight them!**

# 2025

## **ACTS OF SERVICE CAMPAIGN**

EOVS is celebrating individuals and organizations making a difference in the veteran community.

**SUBMIT A STORY**

[mass.gov/forms/2025-acts-of-service-story-submission](https://mass.gov/forms/2025-acts-of-service-story-submission)



# Veteran Remembrances and Upcoming Holidays

## July

Independence Day | July 4

National Hire A Veteran Day | July 25

National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day | July 27

National Buffalo Soldiers Day | July 28

Army Chaplain Corps Anniversary | July 29

## August

Coast Guard Day | August 4

Purple Heart Day | August 7

U.S. Department of Defense Birthday | August 10

Agent Orange Awareness Day | August 10

Navajo Code Talkers Day | August 14

National Airborne Day | August 16

Marine Corps Reserve Birthday | August 29

## September

Labor Day | September 9

V-J Day (Victory over Japan) | September 2

Patriot Day | September 11

Constitution Week | September 17 -23

Air Force (USAF) Birthday | September 18

U.S. Department of Defense birthday | September 18

Air National Guard Birthday | September 18

National POW/MIA Recognition Day | September 19

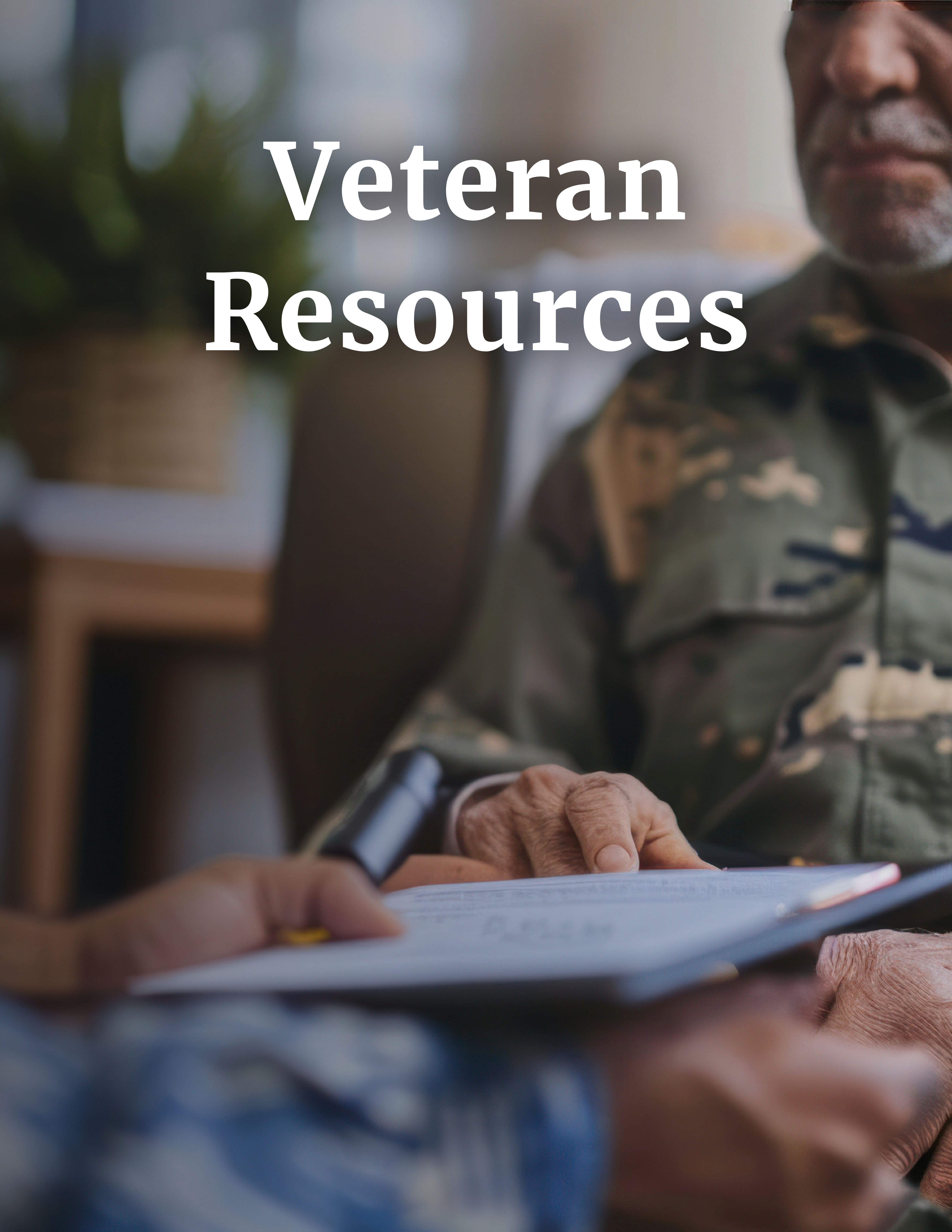
Gold Star Mother's Day | September 28

VFW Day | September 29





# Veteran Resources





# Veteran Helplines & Support

*Massachusetts has Several Comprehensive Helplines that Offer Guidance and Support*

## Statewide Advocacy for Veterans Empowerment (SAVE) Team

SAVE's primary mission is to prevent suicide and mental health distress by identifying issues veterans encounter when returning from service and proactively providing access to benefits and services.

**1-888-844-2838 or visit [mass.gov/SAVE](https://mass.gov/SAVE)**

### Veterans Crisis 24/7 Hot Line:

Dial 988, Press 1  
Text: 828255

### Massachusetts Behavioral Health 24/7 Hot Line:

(833) 773-2445

### Help for Homeless Veterans

(877) 424-3838

### U.S. Army Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention (SHARP) Crisis Line

(202) 498-4009

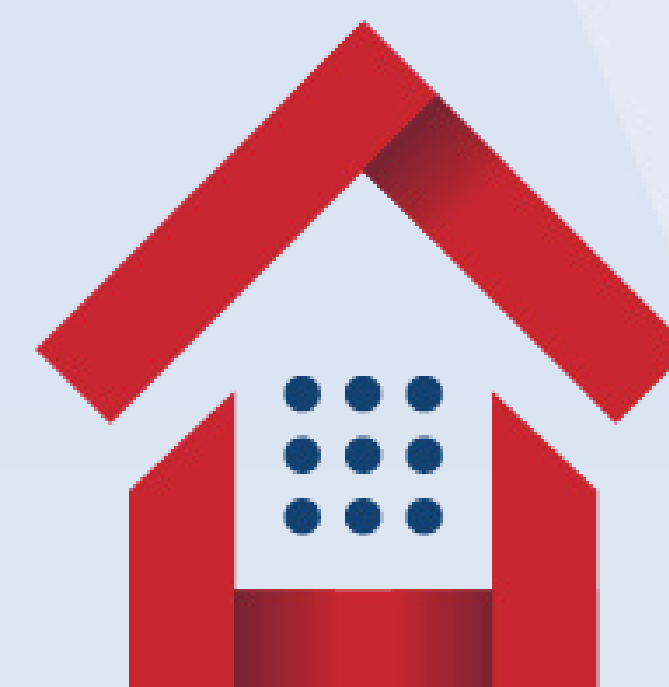


**Feeling stuck?  
Don't know where to turn?**



The Massachusetts Substance Use

**HELPLINE**



National Call Center  
for Homeless Veterans

**877-424-3838**

[va.gov/homeless](https://va.gov/homeless)







### Eligibility for VA Health Care

This guide provides step-by-step instructions for applying, including the required documents for veterans and service members.

[Learn More](#)



### Massachusetts VA Locations

Headlamp provides ex-military personnel with personalized mentorship, resources, and professional development opportunities through its advanced intelligence tools designed to match veterans' military-acquired skills with high-demand civilian jobs, primarily within the biotech industry.

[Learn More](#)



### VA Connected Care

Virtual care is an easy and accessible way to communicate with VA physicians and other health care providers, such as nurses, social workers, and medical assistants.

[Learn More](#)



### Urgent Care and Retail Clinics in Massachusetts

This tool provides a filterable database to help the public find urgent care and retail clinic locations in their community that offer specific services, service times, or accept their insurance type. Urgent care centers and retail clinics are for mild illnesses and minor injuries.

[Learn More](#)





### **Department of Veteran Affairs Veterans Crisis Line**

The Veterans Crisis Line connects veterans in crisis, along with their families and friends, to qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders. This service is available 24/7 via a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text message.

**Contact 800-273-8255**



### **Suicide Prevention Coordinators at MA VA Medical Centers**

#### **VA Boston System**

- Leslie Wright, Ph.D.: (857) 364-3611
- Julie McCarthy, LICSW: (774) 826-3024
- Brittney Stedman, Psy.D.: (774) 826-3459

#### **Bedford VA**

- Rebecca Dreifuss: (781) 687-2176

#### **Leeds (Northampton) VA**

- Jillian Hynek: (413) 584-2112

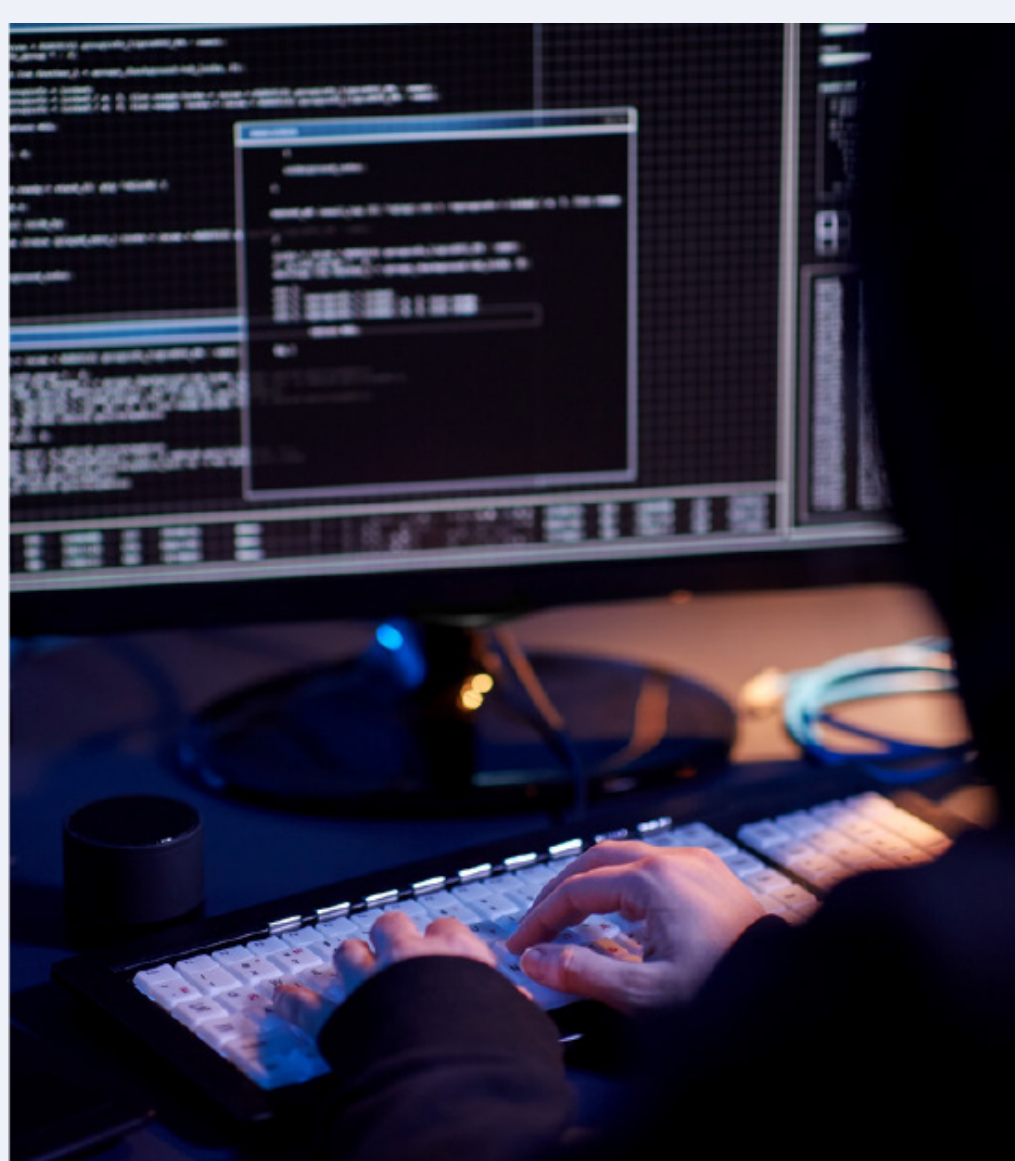
**Learn More**



### **VA Boston Medical Foster Home**

VA Boston's new Medical Foster Home program offers veterans needing 24/7 care an alternative to nursing homes or assisted living facilities. The program matches veterans with approved caregivers who welcome them into their homes. Veterans may also receive assistance applying for VBA benefits to help cover costs.

**Contact 617-435-4362**



### **V Safe**

Veterans and their families are popular targets for financial fraud. Scammers may try to defraud you through misleading emails, texts, cold calls, or online ads. Find resources about fraud targeting you. Know the signs of a scam, get advice about what to do, and learn how to report scams and identity theft.

**Learn More**





### **Free Community College**

The MassReconnect and MassEducate programs can cover the full cost of tuition and fees for all eligible students, plus additional allowances for books, supplies, and other college costs based on income level.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Student Veterans of America® (SVA)**

Student Veterans of America® (SVA) elevates the academic, professional, and personal development of veterans in higher education through chapter programs and services, outcomes and impacts research, and advocacy at every level.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)**

The Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) is a comprehensive education benefit offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to veterans and servicemembers who served after September 10, 2001. This program provides financial support to help individuals further their education and career goals by covering various expenses.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)**

VR&E valuable resource provided by the VA to assist veterans and servicemembers with service-connected disabilities in preparing for, finding, and maintaining suitable employment. The program offers job training, employment accommodations, resume development, career counseling, and educational assistance.

**[Learn More](#)**





### **100% Service-Connected? You May Be Eligible for a Reimbursement**

Since the HERO Act signing, veterans with a 100% service-connected disability no longer need to pay for a driver's license or vehicle registration. If you paid either fee at the RMV after that date, you may qualify for a reimbursement.

**[Apply Now](#)**



### **DAV Transportation to Veterans**

The DAV operates a fleet of vehicles around the country to provide free transportation to VA medical facilities for injured and ill veterans. Use the DAV Hospital Service Coordinator Directory to contact your nearest HSC for information or assistance.

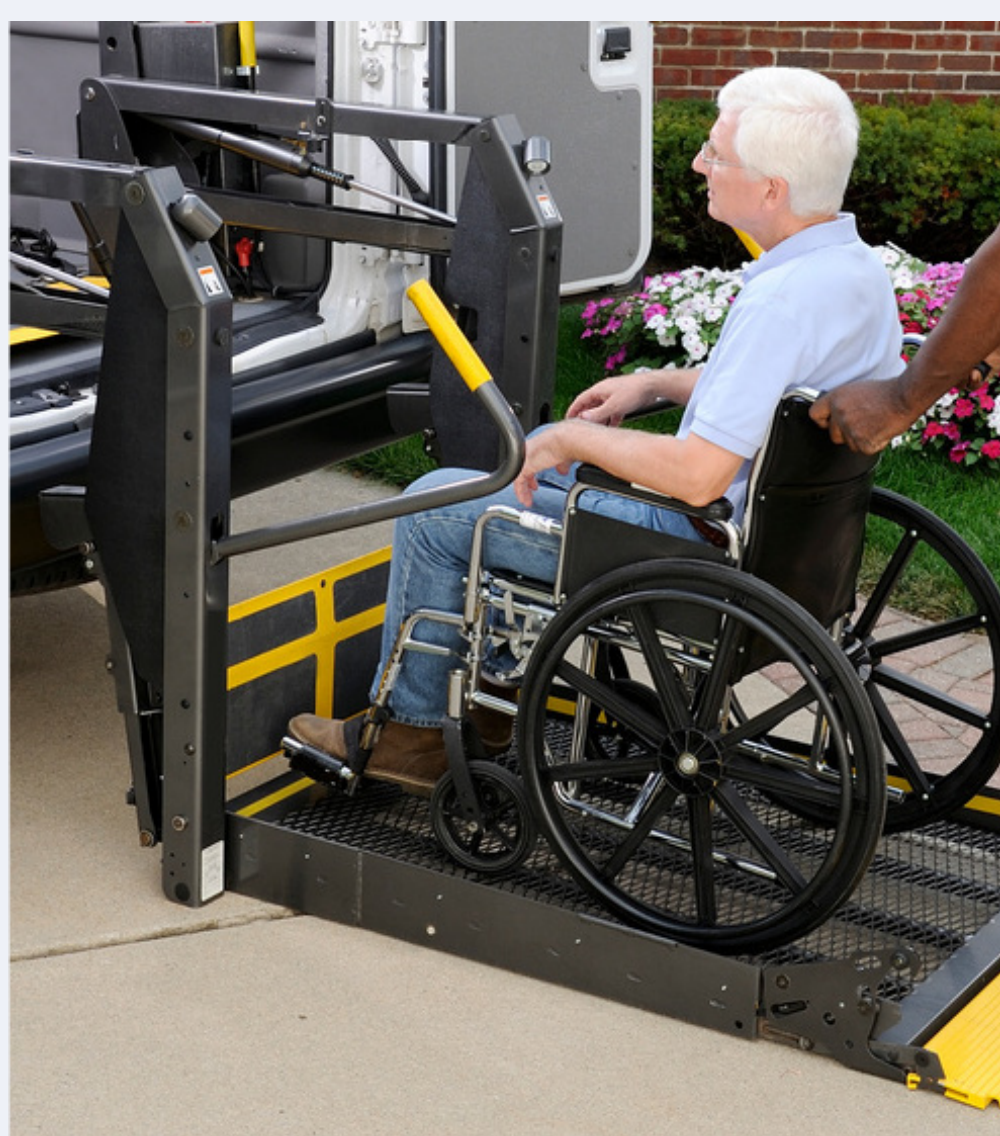
**[Learn More](#)**



### **DPH Health Care Transportation Resources**

Transportation services may be available in Massachusetts to help you get to local or long-distance medical appointments.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Veteran Transportation Resources**

Access a full list of transportation services in Massachusetts to help veterans get to medical appointments, jobs, and other destinations.

**[Learn More](#)**





### **The Women Veterans Transitional Residence at New England Center and Home for Veterans (NECHV)**

Provides women veterans the option for a safe, women-only living space with dedicated case managers and addiction counselors experienced in the complexities of Military Sexual Trauma (MST), PTSD, and other concerns related explicitly to women veterans.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Housing Outreach to Placement Effort (HOPE)**

The HOPE Campaign is an outreach and housing counseling program to provide outreach, service coordination, and housing placement to homeless veterans across all of Massachusetts.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Unmet Needs Grant**

The Unmet Needs Grant helps active-duty service members (including activated Guard/Reserve members) and their families dealing with unexpected financial difficulties due to deployment or other military-related activity or injury. The program provides financial assistance of up to \$2,500 to assist with daily necessities. No repayment is required.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **Free Tickets for Veterans**

The Veteran Tickets Foundation's "Tickets for Troops Program" provides free tickets to active servicemembers for major sports events, leagues, promoters, organizations, and venues.

**[Learn More](#)**





### **Service Dog Program - Clear Path for Veterans New England**

Clear Path's Service Dog Program supports veterans with PTSD, TBI, and MST by pairing them with trained service dogs to build confidence, independence, and wellbeing. Community members can also get involved through the *Canine Raiser* Program.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **K9s for Warriors - Service Dogs for Veterans with PTSD**

K9s for Warriors provides trained service dogs to Veterans with PTSD, TBI, and MST, helping them regain independence and improve quality of life through trusted companionship and support.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **After the Mission**

After the Mission connects veterans with mentors for free guidance on employment, education, VA benefits, and financial stability. No one should have to navigate it alone.

**[Learn More](#)**



### **DVNF GPS Program**

The Disabled Veterans National Foundation offers grants up to \$1,000 to help Veterans facing temporary financial hardship cover rent, mortgage, or essential utilities.

**[Learn More](#)**





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# WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

*Help Shape the Next Edition of The BLUF!*

**At EOVS, we're committed to keeping our community informed, inspired, and connected—and The BLUF is one of the ways we do it.**

We're launching a brief survey to hear your thoughts—whether you read every issue or just skim a few, your feedback is crucial.

- What content is most helpful?
- What topics would you like to see more of?
- How can we make The BLUF a stronger resource for you and the veterans you serve?

**Take a minute to share your ideas.  
Your voice will help shape the next chapter of The BLUF!**



***mass.gov/forms/the-bluf-survey***

**Are you a VSO looking to update your listing?**

**Email Our Engagement Team:**

**EOVSEngagement@mass.gov**

**(617) 210-5480**





Honorably  
Serving  
Those Who  
Served Us.

THE  
**BLUF**  
Bottom Line Up Front



[Mass.gov/VETERANS](https://mass.gov/VETERANS)

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