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For Immediate release - July 21, 2011

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR MURRAY, ATTORNEY GENERAL COAKLEY AND THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES URGE ALL CITIES AND TOWNS TO ENFORCE LAW FOR LOCAL VETERANS AGENTS**Veterans' agents are local contacts providing assistance to veterans seeking access to resources and benefits including employment, housing, clothing and education**

BOSTON - Thursday July 21, 2011 - Lieutenant Governor Timothy P. Murray, Attorney General Martha Coakley and Secretary Coleman Nee of the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) today contacted municipal managers in all 351 cities and towns, reminding municipalities that state law requires cities and towns in the Commonwealth to enforce Chapter 115 of the Massachusetts General Law by providing local veterans' agents.

Though most cities and towns have appointed a veterans' agent, in an effort to ensure Massachusetts veterans receive available benefits and services and that all cities and towns properly abide by Chapter 115, Lieutenant Governor Murray, Attorney General Coakley and Secretary Nee urged municipal managers in a written letter to fully comply with Chapter 115 of the Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 471 of the Acts of 1972 and Title 108 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations.

"Massachusetts is proud to support our brave military servicemen and women by providing benefits and services for veterans and their families," said Lieutenant Governor Murray, Chair of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services. "Engaging and partnering with cities and towns is critical to ensure that veterans receive the benefits they need and have earned. To that end, we have improved tools that will assist local agents in all municipalities, and we look forward to working with them in support of Massachusetts veterans and their families."

"We are grateful to our troops who have made tremendous sacrifices and put their lives on the line in order to protect our country," said Attorney General Coakley. "We want to ensure that veterans and their families understand the full range of benefits the Commonwealth offers them, especially as they return home from deployment."

Massachusetts currently provides some of the most comprehensive veterans' benefits in the country, serving the more than 390,000 veterans across the state. Through DVS, Massachusetts provides veterans with critical resources upon their return home, including financial assistance for food, shelter, clothing, home heating fuel and medical care, as well as employment and vocational assistance, education and counseling. Local veterans' agents partner with DVS to better inform veterans in the community of the range of resources available to veterans and their families.

"As we begin another fiscal year, we recognize the hard work of our Veterans' Services Officers who are on the front lines as well as the commitment from their cities and towns in assisting our Veterans and families every day," said Secretary Nee. The message that we have shared to Veterans' Service Officers offers guidance to assist them in their important work, as well as provides standard guidelines moving forward."

Along with today's request, DVS has recently implemented an electronic benefit tracking and certification system, Web-VSMIS (Veterans Services Management Information Systems), to reduce the paperwork submission process and also increase efficiency and accuracy for veterans' agents and accounting departments in cities and towns. This additional assistance will provide municipalities with an improved system as they work to comply with Chapter 115.

According to Massachusetts law, cities and towns with a population of 12,000 or more must either appoint a full-time veterans' agent, or a full-time director of veterans' services district if the municipality is a constituent member of a veterans' services district. Municipalities with a population of less than 12,000 which are not constituent members of a veterans' services district must appoint a part-time veterans' agent.

Lieutenant Governor Murray, Attorney General Coakley and Secretary Nee emphasized, in today's letter, that "we are proud of the excellent work that our municipal counterparts do each and every day to provide the nation's very best benefits and services for veterans." As the state continues its work to remain a national leader in providing veterans' services and benefits, all cities and towns are required to provide DVS with the name, hours and office of a municipality's veterans' agent on or before September 1, 2011.

To learn more about the Department of Veterans Services, visit www.mass.gov/veterans.

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