



WOMEN VETERANS' NETWORK

Legislative Victory for Peacetime Veterans



Senator Susan Tucker, author of S. 822, with Secretary Tom Kelley at the bill signing

Efforts for the past 10 years finally paid off when Governor Romney signed Senate Bill 822 into law at a public ceremony on Friday, May 28, 2004. The new definition of “veteran” by state law recognizes the contributions of peacetime military veterans by

making them eligible for most of the same state benefits as those who served during periods of war.

Approximately 54,000 Massachusetts veterans, primarily those who served between the Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars are now eligible for state veterans’ benefits. The bill extends veteran’s status to those who served 180 days of regular active duty and who were honorably discharged from the U.S. military between May 8, 1975, and August 1, 1990. Veterans who earned a campaign medal for Lebanon, Grenada, or Panama and those who served in wartime require 90 days of active duty service. The bill also recognizes peacetime veterans with fewer than 180 days active duty who were awarded service-connected disabilities and National Guard and Reserve members with 90 days of regular active service, one day of which is wartime.

For more information about the state’s definition of “veteran,” visit the Department of Veterans’ Services website at www.mass.gov/veterans.

Other veterans’ legislation enacted this session includes Senate Bill 1985 providing military pay differential for those called up and Senate Bill 2164 providing for late counting of overseas ballots for city final elections. Senate Bill 2338 provides for Distinguished Flying Cross plates for veterans, handicapped symbol on disabled veterans’ plates, and Gold Star family license plates.

A Message from Heidi



Joan O'Connor and Heidi Kruckenberg at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial (WIMSA) in Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C., was an inspirational place for me this summer. On a sweltering June day I arrived there to attend the

VA Center for Women Veterans’ National Summit 2004. Despite the oppressive heat I visited the war memorials on the Mall and was especially touched by the beautiful, newly dedicated World War II Memorial. Another highlight was a special reception for Summit participants at the Women’s Memorial, which is amazing.

The VA convenes a Summit every four years that is free and open to anyone interested in women veterans’ issues. The goal of the Summit was to address women veterans’ issues and to make recommendations for legislative, programmatic, and outreach activities. Topics addressed covered a range of veterans’ issues from health care, homelessness, and sexual trauma, to benefits, employment, and research on women veterans’ health.

One of my favorite aspects of the Summit was meeting members of the VA’s Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. Every member of the Committee was in attendance, including Joan O’Connor, General Counsel at the Massachusetts Department of Veterans’ Services. These women are intelligent and experienced, and possess a sense of compassion and concern for women veterans.

It was energizing to listen to veterans and experts share their experiences and knowledge about various issues. I learned a great deal and returned from the Summit with a variety of goals to improve my work.

—Heidi Kruckenberg, *Women’s Coordinator*

-VA Updates -

VA Disability Compensation

The U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs pays disability compensation benefits to veterans who are disabled by injury or disease incurred or aggravated during active military service. The monthly payment is based on the rate of disability (ranging from 10 to 100 percent receiving compensation) and the number of dependents.

A veteran can apply for an increase in a service-connected disability rating by writing to the VA's Boston Regional Office, JFK Federal Building, Boston, MA 02203. The veteran should explain that the disability has worsened and list the medical facility in which treatment has been provided. Please include the veteran's full name, claim number or social security number, and sign the statement. This action will re-open a claim for an increase in a service-connected condition.

A veteran may be rated at zero percent, meaning there is evidence of the service-connected condition, but it does not impair the veteran. An example is a minor scar. This zero percent rating, though not compensable, is beneficial, since it raises the veteran's priority in other VA programs, and it may be reviewed for a higher rating if the condition worsens. A veteran may have a number of disabilities individually evaluated as zero percent, which produce 10 percent combined disability and entitle the veteran to disability compensation.

Veterans whose service-connected disability leaves them unable to maintain gainful employment may meet criteria for allowances at the 100 percent compensation rate under a benefit called "individual unemployability."

Source: VA Fact Sheet, December 2003

Dedham Panera Bread Donates to Boston VA

In honor of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month (October), the Dedham Panera Bread bakery-cafe will offer the special, limited-time-only "Pink Ribbon Bagels for the Cure." For each Pink Ribbon Bagel sold during September and October, the Dedham Panera Bread will donate \$.25 to the Women's Programs at VA Boston Healthcare System to benefit breast cancer treatment and research.

The bagels feature white chocolate chips and cherry chips for a unique pink touch. The pink ribbon has become widely identified with support of breast cancer research.

Military Sexual Trauma Resources



(L-R) Jen Erbe Leggett and Amy Street

The June 2004, Women Veterans' Network Committee meeting focused on Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Dr. Amy Street, co-chair of the VA's National Military Sexual Trauma Work Group presented an overview of MST

and its prevalence. The Boston Vet Center's Sexual Trauma Counselor Jen Erbe Leggett, LICSW, spoke about services available to treat MST.

Military sexual trauma is defined as "experiences of sexual assault or sexual harassment that occur in military settings." Physical force may or may not have been used in the assault. Both women and men experience MST.

The good news about MST is that there are effective treatments that can reduce symptoms and improve quality of life. The VA provides free treatment to any veteran, Reserve, or Guard Member who has experienced MST, regardless of general eligibility for VA healthcare.

For MST services within the VA contact:

- * **Jen Erbe Leggett, LICSW** or **Bonnie Roessner, LICSW**, Sexual Trauma Counselors, Boston Vet Center, 617-424-0665 (male or female veterans)
- * **Eve Davison, Ph.D.**, Clinical Director, Women's Stress Disorder Treatment Team, National Center for PTSD at Jamaica Plain VAMC, 617-232-9500, Ext. 5906 (female veterans only)
- * **Pat Robinson, LICSW**, Women Veterans' Program Manager at Jamaica Plain VAMC, 617-232-9500, Ext. 4120 (female veterans only)
- * **Andrea Carney**, National Center for PTSD, Jamaica Plain VAMC, 617-232-9500, Ext. 4143 (male veterans only)

VA Women Veterans' Program Managers in Mass.

Bedford: Kendra Kiely, LICSW 781-687-2408

Boston, Jamaica Plain Campus: Patricia Robinson, LICSW 617-232-9500, Ext. 4120

Brockton Campus: Diane Harness-DiGloria, NP 508-583-4500 Ext. 1435

Northampton: Mary Sikoski, RN 413-584-4040 Ext. 2620

*** Governor's Advisory Committee Luncheon Registration ***

*Sunday, October 10, 2004 at Noon
Lombardo's, Rt. 28 in Randolph*

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____

Phone: _____

Number of tickets: _____ x \$18 each = \$ _____

Choice of Meal: Chicken _____ Fish _____

(Please indicate choices by number, not a check mark.)

To reserve a table, purchase 10 tickets. Please indicate name under which table should be reserved:

Checks payable to: Women Veterans' Committee

Mail this form with your check to: Bernice Ethier
10 Montello St. Ext.
Brockton, MA 02301

DEADLINE: October 1, 2004

**Governor's Advisory Committee Luncheon
Scheduled for Sunday, October 10, 2004**

The Massachusetts Governor's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans cordially invites you to attend their **Annual Luncheon on Sunday, October 10** at 12:00 noon at Lombardo's, Route 28, in Randolph. Tickets cost \$18 per person and the meal choice is chicken or fish.

There will be a health fair, jewelry sale, and raffle to benefit the work of the Committee. The Committee's fundraising is used to help women veterans in financial need who, for whatever reason, are not able to access VA or state veterans' benefits. The Committee uses its funds to prevent homelessness or to assist women who are leaving a homeless shelter with her security deposit. In the past these funds have been used to help women veterans buy hearing aids and dentures.

For more information about the Annual Luncheon, please contact Bernice Ethier (508-588-4397). Ticket **deadline is October 1, 2004**. No tickets will be sold at the door. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope if you would like to have your tickets mailed to you. Please fill out registration form above.

*** VA HOLIDAY LUNCHEON RESERVATION FORM ***

Catered Lunch at \$15 per person: Chicken soup, salad, family style turkey dinner with all the fixin's, rolls, coffee/tea, and dessert. **OR** Vegetarian

Name: _____ **Vet: Y N**

Address: _____

City/State: _____

Guests: _____

Enclosed is my check in the amount of:

\$ _____ for _____ Turkey Dinners @ \$15 each.

\$ _____ for _____ Vegetarian Dinners @ \$15 each.

Make checks payable to: Women Veterans' Healthcare

Mail this form with your check to:

Jeri Rumsis, Women Veterans' Healthcare Committee 116A
Boston VA Healthcare System
940 Belmont Street, Brockton, MA 02301

DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 11, 2004

5th Annual VA Women Veterans' Recognition Day

The Women Veterans' Healthcare Programs of the Boston VA Healthcare System will host the **5th Annual Holiday Luncheon and Information Fair** for women veterans and their guests on **Saturday, December 4, 2004**, at the USS Jacob Jones VFW, Post 2017, Eastern Avenue in Dedham, MA. The Information Fair will begin at 10:00 a.m. and the Holiday Luncheon at noon.



Edward Banas

Guest speaker will be **Mr. Edward Banas**, the immediate outgoing National Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. He is a Viet Nam veteran who served with the 18th Military Police Brigade and received numerous medals and awards.

Holiday spirit will be the order of the day with special gifts presented to women veterans in uniform and those presenting their VA cards. Reserve early, this has been a sell-out luncheon the past three years. Contact Jeri Rumsis (508-583-4500, Ext. 3133), Pat Robinson (617-232-9500, Ext. 4120), or Diane Harness-DiGloria (508-583-4500, Ext. 1435) with questions.

Tickets are \$15 each. Menu choice of turkey dinner or vegetarian. Tables of 10 may be reserved by sending a check for \$150. Please see reservation form above.

Department of Veterans' Services
Attn: Women Veterans' Network
600 Washington Street, Suite 1100
Boston, MA 02111

Bulk Rate

If you don't wish to be on our mailing list or if your address is incorrect, please send your request for removal or address change in writing to the address in the upper-left corner of this page.

"Early" TRICARE Benefit

Under the National Defense Authorization Act and the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2004, members of the National Guard and Reserve (collectively referred to as Reserve Component or RC) who are issued delayed-effective-date active duty orders for more than 30 days in support of a contingency operation, are now eligible for "early" TRICARE medical and dental benefits beginning on the latter of either: (a) the date their orders were issued or (b) 60 days before the member reported to active duty.

According to this law, the 2004 Temporary Reserve Health Benefit Program is in effect Nov. 6, 2003 to Dec. 31, 2004, the date the temporary benefit ends. The Department of Defense implemented this temporary program on July 20, 2004. In order to be eligible for this early TRICARE benefit, RC members and family members must be eligible and enrolled in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). The member's Service personnel office is responsible for determining the member's eligibility for the early TRICARE benefit.

For more information call (888) 999-5195 or visit www.tricare.osd.mil.

Open Enrollment for Prescription Advantage



Prescription Advantage, the state prescription drug insurance plan administered by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, will conduct an annual Open Enrollment period **September 1-30, 2004**. The effective date of coverage will be November 1, 2004.

Massachusetts residents who are not receiving prescription drug benefits under Medicaid are eligible if they are age 65 or older; or under age 65, work 40 hours or fewer hours per month, meet MassHealth's CommonHealth disability requirements, and have gross annual household incomes at or below 188% of the Federal Poverty Level (single \$17,503, married \$24,481). Individuals age 65 or younger can join at any time during the year. Those age 66 and older can only join during open enrollment period.

For more information or to apply, call 800-AGE-INFO (800-243-4636).

Source: Executive Office of Elder Affairs Press Release, June 29, 2004