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## **The Vermont Legislative Research Shop**

### **State Benefits for Veterans**

Veterans are generally offered benefits in four main categories: health care, education, employment, and tax exemptions. These benefits are established in order to compensate for national service in the military and are not just limited to the aforementioned categories. Benefits range from home loans at discounted rates to free or discounted recreational licenses. Although veteran's benefits are offered at the federal level, states coordinate supplementary benefits programs as well. Since such programs are managed by each state, benefits may vary from state to state. Table 1 lists benefits offered to veterans by the states. The following report presents an array of veteran's benefits organized by state. (Note: Although states may offer similar programs, certain veterans may or may not be eligible depending upon the eligibility requirements set forth by each state).

#### **Education**

Forms of education benefits may include assistance such as scholarships, tuition waivers, as well as education loans. Additionally, some states choose to extend education benefits to spouses and dependents of veterans; such benefits vary in scope by state and also vary in terms of eligibility criteria for participation.

#### **Benefits for Spouses/Dependents—Illinois**

The state of Illinois offers financial assistance for children ages 10-18 to attend a state educational institution, including vocational education. This benefit may be offered to the children of veterans of certain wars who have either died in service or are completely disabled. Additionally, the National Guard offers a separate scholarship program for Illinois National Guard veterans (Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, 2002).

#### **Specialized Programs—Massachusetts “VUB”**

In Massachusetts, certain veterans may take advantage of the state-run “Veterans Upward Bound” (VUB) program. The program entitles eligible veterans (including National Guard veterans) the opportunity to attend specialized classes at the University of Massachusetts in Boston. The classes are designed to prepare veterans for the academic rigors of attending college. Eligibility is affected by factors such as being a first generation college student, low income, academic need, and an honorable discharge (Massachusetts Department of Veterans Affairs, 2003).

**Table 1: State Government Aid to US Veterans**

<b>Veteran Benefits by State</b>	
<b>BENEFITS</b>	<b>STATES</b>
<b>Education:</b>	
Education Benefits for Dependents	All states except GA, HI, MD, NV, OK, OR, RI, UT, VT, WI
Education Benefits for Veterans	All states except AL, AK, CA, GA, HI, IN, KY, LA, ME, MD, MI, MO, NV, NM, NC, OK, PA, SC VT, UT
Specialized Programs	IL, MA, MN, NM, TX, WA, WV, WY
<b>Exemptions:</b>	
State Income Tax	AL, DE, GA, ID, KS, MI, MO, NJ, OK, SC, WV
Homestead/Real Estate Tax	All states except AZ, CO, DE, IA, LA, OK, VT, WA, WV, WI, WY
Motor Vehicle Tax	AL, AZ, AR, CT, GA, HI, ME, MD, MA, MN, NE, NJ, NM, NY, NC, ND, RI, SC, TN, VA, WY
Recreational License/Permit Fees	All states except CT, HI, KS, MA, NJ, ND, RI, VT
Occupational License Fee	AL, CT, FL, GA, NJ
Other Exemptions/License Waivers	AR, CO, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, IA, MA, MN, NH, NJ, NY, OH, PA, RI, SD, TN, UT
<b>Employment:</b>	
Preferential Treatment for Civil Service Jobs	All states except NV, VT
<b>Miscellaneous:</b>	
Emergency Financial Assistance	AR, CT, ID, IL, IA, MA, MI, MN, NE, NJ, ND, OH, OK, PA, SD, WA, WI
Public Housing	MA, RI
Transportation Assistance	NJ
Loans (Home, Personal, Etc.)	CA, HI, ME, MS, OR, TX, WI
State Tax Filing Extension	CT, GA, NY, ND, OK, VA,

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Source: State of Vermont, Office of Veterans Affairs

## **Tuition Waivers—Connecticut**

Some states have education benefits offered only to the veterans themselves, and are intended to supplement the Montgomery G.I. Bill (Federal education assistance for veterans). For example, Connecticut offers partial and full tuition waivers that can be used for both undergraduate and graduate studies at Connecticut state universities and community colleges (Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs, March 2001). Eligible veterans for tuition waivers in Connecticut must have been honorably discharged and have resided in Connecticut for a minimum of one year. A separate program has been established by the Connecticut Department of Education, which grants tuition waivers to Army National Guard veterans to attend Connecticut state universities and community colleges (Connecticut Army National Guard, 2003).

## **Tax Exemptions**

### **State Income Tax**

State income tax exemption is often offered to military retirees and survivors receiving Survivor Benefit Payments (SBP). Exemptions can sometimes be applied only to income from pensions paid by employers, public or private, such as in Delaware (Delaware Department of Veterans' Affairs). Also, these benefits and exemptions are frequently deducted from other governmental charges and taxes.

### **Homestead/Real Estate Tax**

Real estate or homestead tax exemptions provide partial to full exemption from property tax for a veteran's home. In Georgia, in order to be eligible for such exemptions, maximum property value may not exceed \$32,500 (Georgia Department of Veterans' Affairs). Generally, the veteran must own and occupy the property. The exemption is a real estate property tax credit, not a reduction in assessed value of the property, but a reduction in the amount of tax. The amount varies, depending on family income.

### **Motor Vehicle Tax**

Motor vehicle tax exemptions are offered to wartime veterans who have received a VA auto grant. The benefit provides exemption from ad valorem taxes. Additional benefits are available to veterans who have received VA auto grants. Sometimes the vehicle tax exemption is only offered to veterans who have a Handicapped (HV) Motor Vehicle license plate, this is the case in Georgia (Georgia Department of Veterans' Affairs).

### **Recreational License/Permit Fees**

Veterans commonly receive recreational benefits within their home states. State park entrance fees are commonly waived, along with the fees associated with the acquisition of fishing and hunting licenses. These benefits are sometimes manifested in the reduced price of tags for various animals, such as bears, deer, and elk. Such is the case, for example, in Idaho (Idaho Department of Veterans' Affairs).

## **Occupational License Fee**

Exemptions (or reduced fees) for occupational or business licenses are applicable if veterans conduct the business as a means of livelihood, the business has no more than one employee, besides the veteran, there's an income/net worth test, and the exemption doesn't apply to "rolling stores." Sometimes time limits are placed upon these benefits, such as in Alabama where the veterans' exemption is valid for up to six years after discharge from service (Alabama Department of Veterans' Affairs). Connecticut offers the waiver of re-licensing fees to active duty service members with specific occupations: engineers, cosmetologists, surveyors, opticians, and sanitarians (Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs).

## **Other Exemptions/License Waivers**

Aside from the aforementioned exemptions and waivers, many states offer additional, miscellaneous benefits to veterans. Waivers of most fees for a hawker and peddler's licenses are offered in Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Affairs). Antler-less deer licenses are provided at reduced costs to veterans in Pennsylvania (Pennsylvania Department of Veterans' Affairs). The state of New York offers a free New York State Thruway Permit to wartime veterans with auto grants (New York Department of Veterans' Affairs).

## **Employment Benefits**

Certain employment benefits are offered to United States veterans. The most common employment benefit is preferential treatment in civil service jobs. What this usually translates to is a veteran's application for employment will be granted priority above other applicants. The manner in which states grant preference varies by state. A common form in which this is achieved is by testing. If a certain score is attained, a specific number of points may be awarded to the veteran's application (and thus credentials), serving as further promotion for employment.

## **Specialized Programs**

Certain states sponsor specialized programs for veterans and/or disabled veterans. For example, California's Disabled Veterans Enterprise Business Program strives to assign three per cent of state contracts to Disabled Veteran Business Enterprises (DVBEs) (California Department of Veterans' Affairs). Since the three percent is an objective and not necessarily a requisite, it is not guaranteed that three percent of contracts will be awarded to DVBEs. However, it is a requirement that state agencies consider eligible DVBEs when contracting. Eligibility requirements (to be considered a DVBE) are set forth by the state. (California Department of Veterans Affairs)

A New York Program grants noncompetitive state jobs for veterans with the same promotional rights as competitive employees (New York Department of Veterans' Affairs). In order to be eligible, veterans must be disabled but able to complete the duties of the job. Opportunities are also made available to veterans regarding licensing. For example, certain states authorize veterans to work as auctioneers and/or book agents without a license.

## **Miscellaneous**

### **Emergency Financial Assistance**

Emergency financial assistance is often extended to wartime veterans who are ill or unemployed, but the benefits are sometimes extended to spouses and children, surviving spouses and surviving minor children, such as in Oklahoma (Oklahoma Department of Veterans' Affairs). Maximum benefits are often defined in dollars and days. A \$600 maximum is extended to veterans in Connecticut, and benefits to Pennsylvanian veterans are available for a period not to exceed 3 months in a 12-month period (Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs, Pennsylvania Department of Veterans' Affairs). Assistance is limited to basics, such as mortgage, rent, food, clothing, and medical expenses. Emergency financial assistance is offered to minor children of recently deceased or medically incapacitated Arkansas veterans (Arkansas Department of Veterans' Affairs). Eligibility requirements signify that the veteran must have been medically incapacitated or hospitalized within the last 30 days or have died within the last 6 months.

### **Public Housing**

Only Massachusetts and Rhode Island offer specific public housing benefits to veterans. Preference in tenant selection for state housing is extended to wartime veterans and dependents in Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Affairs). Rhode Island vaguely declares that veterans will receive "preference in public housing" (Rhode Island Department of Veterans' Affairs).

### **Loans (Home, Personal, Etc.)**

Several states offer special loans to veterans for home or personal use. The Cal-Vet Loan Program in California offers loans for home or farm purchase or improvement. Service persons, veterans, and un-remarried surviving spouses are entitled to such loans. The benefits feature state-subsidized home loans with a 30-year mortgage and low interest rates. The loan may be used for buying a home or farm or for home improvement. A Loan Origination Fee of 1% is charged and the buyer must meet credit guidelines (California Department of Veterans' Affairs). In Hawaii, grants are extended for home purchase or remodeling, but must be used to adapt a house to meet the veteran's needs. The grant does not exceed \$5000. Some, but not all, veterans who are eligible for the VA Specially Adapted Housing grant are eligible for the Hawaii state grant, but the housing grant is issued only when funds are available (Hawaii Department of Veterans' Affairs). Maine maintains benefit guaranties for a small business loan to Maine veterans. The benefit is a loan guaranty; the veteran has to find his/her own lender. The veteran must own at least 51% of the business (Maine Department of Veterans' Affairs).

### **State Tax Filing Extension**

Many states offer state tax filing extensions to veterans in a combat zone, prisoners of war, and veterans hospitalized from combat injuries. Service members must be currently serving in a combat zone, or currently hospitalized because of an injury received in a combat zone. An area designated by the federal government as a "qualified hazardous duty area" also meets the

requirement. For Service persons in a combat zone, the state of Georgia provides the extension while in combat zone plus the next 180 days. For prisoners of war, the extension is granted while in combat zone plus while in confinement plus the next 180 days. For Service persons hospitalized as a result of a combat injury, extension last while in combat zone plus while in continuous hospitalization plus the next 180 days (Georgia Department of Veterans' Affairs). The state of New York also offers 6-month extensions (approximately 180 days) to veterans for various tax filing (New York Department of Veterans' Affairs).

### **Miscellaneous Benefits**

The state of New Jersey has a unique program that provides transportation assistance to veterans to attend medical appointments and treatments within the state. The New Jersey Department of Veterans Affairs explains the program as: "Free transportation is offered to VA medical centers, clinics, pharmacies, private physicians, regional veterans services offices or job service offices, and other community services in most counties" (New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, 2003). Eligibility for transportation assistance applies only to veterans meeting specific eligibility requirements, as defined by the state of New Jersey.

### **What are the federal statutes regarding Veteran Transition Assistance?**

The Department of Defense (DoD) offers an array of transition assistance services to veterans ranging from employment to educational opportunities. As far as employment assistance services, the DoD sponsors workshops with instructors from the Department of Labor; hosts career fairs, grants veterans access to specific job listings not available to civilians, offers career counseling, supports the 'Troops to Teachers' program, confers preferential treatment in federal service employment candidacy, etc. These transitional opportunities are offered regionally in transition offices situated across the nation.

The DoD also offers limited relocation assistance by means of partially or fully funding moving and traveling costs depending on the individual situation. Temporary housing is also made available for up to three months for veterans and their families until permanent residency is established.

Education and training information is readily available to veterans. Veterans who wish to return to school may opt to take advantage of the Montgomery GI Bill and the Veteran Educational Assistance Program (this program may not be utilized by all veterans as certain eligibility restrictions apply) (Veterans Educational Assistance Program). Vocational interests tests, testing for college credits, educational counseling as well as admissions testing is offered by transition offices across the country and even in select foreign countries.

Lastly, healthcare is a major aspect of transition services. A separation physical and a dental examination are two services offered right before military medical insurance expires. Copies of medical and dental records are also made available to the veterans. Veterans may be eligible to purchase temporary medical insurance (Continued Health Care Benefit Program) and if, after 60 days, they are satisfied with the services offered, there is an option to purchase CHCBP. Life insurance policies may also be purchased after the post-separation 120-day trial passes (Veterans Group Life Insurance).

A host of miscellaneous transitional benefits are also offered such as potential eligibility for separation pay, unemployment compensation for ex-service members who are unable to find a job, VA home loans that offer competitive rates, FHA Mortgage Insurance and Small Business Association Loans. (The Department of Defense Transportal DoD Transition Assistance Program).

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