



HONORING OUR VETERANS:
SUPPORTING THOSE WHO PROTECT US

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HONORING OUR VETERANS

Massachusetts is home to almost half a million veterans. These brave men and women, as well as their loved ones, deserve quality care and steadfast support. I am committed to ensuring that we provide for all of the needs of our veterans while they are in service, and when they return home.

As Attorney General, I have been committed to supporting our nation's brave service members by helping them receive the benefits they have earned, navigate state agencies, and guarantee their access to Veterans Services Officers and economic and employment opportunities. In the Senate, I will work to ensure that veterans have the resources they need to provide for themselves and their families, access state-of-the-art medical care, live securely in their homes, and find fulfilling and well-paying employment after their time in the service.

DELIVERING BENEFITS

It is our responsibility to provide veterans with the aid they need when they return home. As Attorney General, I have worked with other state officials to guarantee that veterans receive the benefits they have earned. I required municipalities to document their compliance with state law mandating full- and part-time Veterans Service Officers, which were at risk of being downsized because of the economic crisis.¹ Under my guidance, in 2009, the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office launched a website and a resource guide for veterans to shepherd them through the benefits appeals process and provide vital, tailored information about medical care, death benefits, financial assistance, education, housing, and employment rights.²

¹ Monahan, John J. "State Reminds Officials of Need for Veterans Services; March Deadline for Compliance." *Worcester Telegram & Gazette*, Jan. 30, 2008, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/State+reminds+officials+of+need+for+veterans+services%3b+March+deadline...-a0174054689>.

² Attorney General's Veterans' Resource Guide; Attorney General's Guide to Appealing a VA Benefits Decision or Denial, www.mass.gov/Cago/docs/civilrights/vets_guide_120508.pdf; www.mass.gov/?pageID=cagoterminal&L=4&L0=Home&L1=Civil+Rights&L2=Veterans%27+Resources&L3=Medical+Care+%26+Death&sid=Cago&b=terminalcontent&f=civilrights_veterans_appealing_va_benefits&csid=Cago.

In the Senate, I will support mandatory full funding of the Veterans Administration (“VA”). The current funding process is woefully inadequate because there is no guaranteed funding level or timeline. This means that regional VA offices and hospitals cannot accurately predict costs, leaving them understaffed and without needed equipment, resulting in substandard care and devastating delays for veterans who need service. We must give the VA predictable, timely funding so it can provide veterans with the care they deserve.

Full funding will aid in reducing the backlog of claims, but much more needs to be done. I support measures to require and assist the VA in tracking down veterans who are not collecting their benefits. I also support efforts to overhaul the VA data system to make Veterans Benefits Administration (“VBA”) files available electronically. Currently, veterans are forced to fill out multiple copies of the same form, and they are confronted by delays and confusion in what can often become a demoralizing process. We should transition into an electronic system that will sync all veterans’ health, personnel, and benefits records.

The collective expertise and creativity of our nation’s committed VA workers can be harnessed to improve the system. Projects like the VBA Innovation Initiative do just this, at a low cost and high potential return.³ This summer, the President challenged VBA personnel to take part in the White House’s open government initiative to propose ideas for clearing the red tape from the benefits process. From these ideas, management will submit several for presentation and eventual implementation. I also support expanding the Disability Evaluation System pilot program, which began in November 2007.⁴ This program encourages collaboration and efficiency in the Department of Defense and VBA-managed disability rating processes so that veterans can get their benefits sooner.

³ VBA Innovation Initiative, www.whitehouse.gov/open/innovations/vaii.

⁴ Press Release. VA and DoD Announce Disability Evaluation System Pilot Expansion, Nov. 17, 2009, <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1820>.

PROVIDING QUALITY HEALTH CARE

The incredible sacrifices borne by our veterans and their families often include injuries we cannot readily see. Veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan suffer from mental health conditions, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (“PTSD”), which are not always adequately screened or diagnosed. I support measures to increase the availability and quality of screening and counseling for mental health conditions. I also support fully funding research on traumatic brain injuries (“TBI”), as well as programs that offer specialized support for the families of veterans suffering from these injuries.

VA hospitals and care centers must undergo comprehensive improvements to address the changing needs of returning veterans. This can be achieved in part through implementing regular inspections of VA facilities. As Senator, I will champion efforts to recruit nurses and other health care workers for VA hospitals. In some cases, local, community-based health services can provide veterans with more personal, one-on-one treatment. I support allowing veterans to access non-VA healthcare at VA expense in cases where the VA cannot provide the veteran with adequate services, either because the veteran lives in an area underserved by the VA, or because his or her health needs are unique.

I am also committed to the needs of women veterans, over 25,000 of whom live in Massachusetts. Women have served in unprecedented conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan and have unique healthcare needs. Prior generations of women veterans have continued to fight for equal access to care. As Senator, I will advocate for targeted, woman-centered health care, help with childcare for those in VA hospitals, specialized sexual assault treatment, improved prenatal and newborn care, and more research into the particular health issues of women who served in the armed forces.

ENSURING A SEAMLESS TRANSITION

As soldiers return home, they and their families need support transitioning back into civilian life. In Washington, I will work to ensure that all of our veterans have the resources they need, including adequate compensation, access to affordable health care, family counseling, child care, housing assistance, education, and job training. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans face unique challenges, and especially in this difficult financial climate, it is our moral duty to ensure their needs are met.

Returning service members who are in debt will find the road home particularly difficult. One of the best ways to help their transition back to civilian life is to increase compensation and ensure that health care costs remain low. I support raising military pay. I also support adjusting the VA's Schedule for rating disability to ensure veterans are compensated for both work-related losses, as well as losses from the ability to engage in activities other than work and, where appropriate, for diminished quality of life. I oppose TRICARE fee increases or any changes that will negatively impact the quality or cost of our veterans' health care. It would be unjust to raise veterans' health care fees while working towards health care reform to lower costs for everyone else.

Veterans must also be able to find quality, long-term employment. As Attorney General, I worked closely with the Department of Labor, Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, and other state and federal agencies to ensure our active duty troops and veterans, particularly disabled veterans, had equal access to jobs, housing, and other community resources. However, I believe more needs to be done. I applaud the passage of the new Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, which is already helping veterans get back to school. That said, like all of us, I am deeply concerned that checks have not been issued on time and that far too many veterans are still waiting for the benefits they were promised.

To ensure that veterans can find meaningful employment after their service, Congress should pass the Post-9/11 Veterans' Job Training Act of 2009 that provides further assistance for on-the-job training programs, apprenticeships, internships, police and fire academies, and other non-

degree granting programs.⁵ Unlike the original G.I. Bill, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill specifically limits coverage to degree-granting programs. As a result, some veterans do not have access to programs that are designed specifically to pave viable and prosperous career pathways. We should provide assistance to these veterans who seek hands-on, career-oriented educational experience.

Our veterans face pressures that are unimaginable to most Americans. Fostering a seamless transition for veterans demands that state and federal agencies and the VA work together to reach out to veterans who need assistance.

SUPPORTING MILITARY FAMILIES

Military families endure some of the most difficult hardships while living on a military base, at home while their loved ones are deployed, and caring for their loved ones when they return home. In the Senate, I will work to ease the burden on all military families. They deserve meaningful transition assistance, health care, family counseling, and housing assistance. Military families that have been especially affected by the recession will also benefit from financial help and foreclosure protection.

Especially in this difficult financial climate, we must ensure that military housing is comfortable, safe, and suitable for families. I support raising standards for base housing and increasing allowances for temporary lodging expenses. In the Senate, I will work to help disabled veterans stay in their homes by raising the amount that the VA provides to retrofit homes so they are accessible for those with service-connected disabilities.⁶

We also must work to ensure that military families are not at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure. The VA does not track the number of military families who have been foreclosed upon, but it is clear from the number of veterans seeking emergency loans that they have been hit very hard by the housing crisis. I support increased foreclosure protection to help military

⁵ *H.R. 3337: Post-9/11 Veterans' Job Training Act of 2009.*

⁶ *H.R. 1293: Disabled Veterans Home Improvement and Structural Alteration Grant Increase Act of 2009.*

families navigate the recession. The Service Members Civil Relief Act of 2008 has protected some active-duty soldiers from foreclosure and eviction. In the Senate, I will work to pass even stronger safeguards to protect active-duty military and veterans from home foreclosures.⁷

We must support family members who provide their loved ones with care. To this end, I support expanding the Family Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”) to enhance medical leave benefits for family members of veterans, provide even more time off from work for those caring for a wounded service member, and allow more active service members to use FMLA leave time when they are deployed.

PROMOTING COMMITMENT AND RESPECT

We must demonstrate a consistent commitment to meeting the needs of our service members and their families. We must honor the sacrifices of our veterans and their families with concrete, targeted investments in veterans’ housing, health care, mental health treatment, training, equipment, employment, and benefits. We also must honor the work our service members perform by combating discrimination, and championing the causes that matter most to those who face undue hardships when they return.

I believe that any qualified individual who wishes to join the armed forces should be not banned from doing so because of his or her sexual orientation. I support ending the "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy, which has caused the discharge of over 12,500 service members to date, and harassment of countless others. The dishonorable discharge of so many qualified men and women has weakened our military strength. I will fight for the right of all Americans to serve their country openly, and the rights of all military families to be treated equally.

I am concerned about the plight of homeless veterans. As Senator, I will work to end homelessness by requiring the VA to seek those who have earned benefits but are not collecting them, supporting shelters, including family-friendly and women-only shelters, reaching out to veterans to provide housing, education, and employment assistance, and supporting research on

⁷ *Military Families and Veterans Homes Protection Act of 2009.*

and treatment of mental health problems. In the Senate, I will work to provide housing assistance to very low-income veterans who might otherwise become homeless.⁸ In Massachusetts, there are 7,000 homeless veterans – this is 7,000 too many.

Finally, we cannot turn our backs on any veteran. In the Senate, I will fully fund and support the work of the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command. Anything less would be an affront to the brave service members who have sacrificed their lives for our well being. We must continue to ensure that POW/MIA is a national priority. In Washington, I will not lose sight of these priorities, and I will fight to ensure that all of our service members are honored and brought home.

⁸ *S. 1160: Homes for Heroes Act of 2009.*