

VETERANS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Veterans, you have a right to:

- File a written application for veterans' benefits at anytime. You can insist upon this right, even if told that you are ineligible [108 CMR 4:02(1)].
- Get help from your local city or town Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) or town clerk in completing your application [M.G.L., ch. 115, s. 3].
- Receive a full explanation of the services and veteran's benefits available under M.G.L., Chapter 115, as well as other available benefits.
- Receive a written notice and explanation of the approval or denial of your application for benefits [108 CMR 8:02 (1)].
- Be treated with dignity and respect and to receive accurate, courteous, and timely service.
- Appeal and request a hearing if you disagree with any action taken in your case [108 CMR 8:07(1)].
- Expect confidentiality: personal information will not be collected or used except for the purpose of determining your eligibility for benefits [M.G.L. ch.40, s. 51].
- Receive fair and equal treatment without regard to veterans' status [M.G.L., ch. 40, s. 51] race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, or handicap [M.G.L. ch. 151B, s. 3].
- Preference in public employment [M.G.L., ch. 31, s. 25 and ch. 41, s. 112].

For additional information on your rights, speak to your local VSO by calling City/Town Hall or the Department of Veterans' Services at 617.210.5480.

HISTORY

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts began providing for its needy veterans immediately following the Revolutionary War. At the start of the Civil War in 1861, the state legislature formalized the assistance provided to veterans by establishing M.G.L. Chapter 115 and the Department of Veterans' Services. State and local government leaders wanted to provide benefits to men and women (both living and deceased) who had borne the burden of military duty—and to their families. Chapter 115 enables every eligible Massachusetts veteran to receive certain financial, medical, educational, employment, and other benefits earned by military service. Veterans' Service Officers (VSO) in 351 municipalities across the state help veterans and families connect with benefits.

The VSO is your first point of contact to access state Chapter 115 benefits. Appointed by the mayors or selectmen of the cities and towns, the VSO interviews applicants, determines eligibility, and administers benefits. VSOs are available to anyone seeking information or assistance in the area of veterans' benefits and services. They may be reached at their City/Town Halls.

The support that the Commonwealth gives to a deserving segment of the population through the locally based veterans' assistance programs is unlike that of any other in the nation and the envy of other states.

VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICERS

Your first point of contact.

For more than 100 years, a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) has been available in every Massachusetts city and town to provide an array of services to veterans and their dependents. VSOs are municipal employees with expert knowledge of federal, state, and local resources and benefits for veterans. Your VSO is your first point of contact to access state Chapter 115 benefits.

Your VSO can provide information about:

annuities	graves care
awards and medals	housing
burial	license plates
Chapter 115 benefits	medical assistance
education	pensions
elder services	pharmaceuticals
employment	real estate tax exemption
flags and markers	review of discharge
financial assistance	sales tax exemptions
food	

VSO _____

Location _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Office hours _____

MISSION STATEMENT: The mission of the Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) is to act as the chief advocate for the nearly half million veterans of the Commonwealth and their families. DVS establishes policy, proposes legislation, ensures that adequate funding for veterans' programs is included in the Governor's budget, and represents the interests of veterans in matters before the General Court. In addition, DVS represents all state agencies and individual veterans before the federal Department of Veterans Affairs in securing federal compensation and other available benefits.



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES

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SA3548 September 2015



**WE OWE
YOU**
BENEFITS AND SERVICES

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES

STATE BENEFITS

ANNUITY

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides an annuity in the amount of \$2,000 to 100% service-connected disabled veterans, to the parents of men and women who die in service (Gold Star parents), and to unremarried spouses (Gold Star wives or husbands) of veterans who gave their lives in the service of their country during wartime. To apply, contact your VSO or visit mass.gov/veterans.

BONUSES

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides a one-time bonus to eligible veterans who served during wartime, from World War II through Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. Call 617.210.5927 for the Persian Gulf War Bonus. For all other bonuses contact the Office of the State Treasurer 617.367.3900, ext. 543, or for OEF/OIF ext. 539.

CEMETERIES

There are three veterans' cemeteries in Massachusetts. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs operates the national cemetery in Bourne, on Cape Cod (508.563.7113). The state operates cemeteries in Agawam (413.821.9500) and Winchendon (978.297.9501). Eligible veterans can be buried in state and federal cemeteries for free and spouses for a nominal fee.

CHAPTER 115 BENEFITS

Chapter 115 provides a needs based means tested program of financial and medical assistance for indigent veterans and their dependents. Qualifying veterans and their dependents receive necessary financial assistance for food, shelter, clothing, housing supplies, and medical care. Contact your local VSO to apply.

EDUCATION BENEFITS

Veterans are eligible for tuition waivers at all state colleges and universities. Members of the Massachusetts National Guard receive a tuition and fee waiver at all state schools. Contact the Veterans' Representative at the state college/university of your choice for eligibility requirements and to apply.

EMPLOYMENT

Veterans are given preference for employment on the eligibility list for civil service positions. Job search and assistance is also available for veterans at 32 One-Stop Career Centers across the state. For a complete listing of career centers call 877.US2.JOBS or go to servicelocator.org/nearest_onestop.asp.

HOUSING SERVICES

DVS contracts with a range of nonprofit organizations, which provide housing services to eligible veterans. All require that residents maintain a sober and drug-free environment. Services are available to both male and female veterans. For a complete listing, see mass.gov/veterans.

MASSVETSADVISOR.ORG

This new web portal is designed to allow veterans and their family members the benefits they need and deserve. MassVetsAdvisor.org streamlines comprehensive data from state and federal resources and lists only the benefits and services each veteran is qualified for, including an "action plan" to apply for the benefits. Veterans will be able to print, email, save or forward the action plan to their Veterans Services Officer for additional one-on-one assistance.

MOTOR VEHICLE BENEFITS

The Registry of Motor Vehicles now offers the option of having a "Veteran" designation added to licenses upon renewal. The RMV also provides a variety of veterans' license plates and a registration exemption for certain

veterans. Call 617.351.9222 or see massrmv.com for the registration exemption. Certain disabled veterans and former POWs are eligible for motor vehicle sales and excise tax exemptions. Contact the Department of Revenue at 617.887.6367.

OUTREACH CENTERS

Outreach Centers are non-profit organizations that contract through DVS to assist veterans and their families with a range of services. Services vary by location and can include: assistance and referrals to obtain federal and state veterans' benefits; counseling services; food pantry and clothing closets; transportation services; and community activities. For a complete listing, see mass.gov/veterans.

PROPERTY TAXES

There are a number of exemptions available to certain disabled veterans and their survivors. Contact your local Veterans' Service Officer or city/town assessor.

SAVE PROGRAM

A peer outreach program that helps veterans navigate the system of benefits and services through active outreach in the community, SAVE's mission is suicide prevention and advocacy of veterans benefits and services. Outreach coordinators are mobile and meet with veterans in the field. The outreach team is comprised of veterans and family members of veterans. Call 888.844.2838 or email SAVE at save@massmail.state.ma.us.

SOLDIERS' HOMES

The Soldiers' Homes in Chelsea (617.884.5660) and Holyoke (413.532.9475) provide a variety of services to veterans, such as acute hospital, domiciliary, and long-term care; physical and occupational therapy and more.

WOMAN VETERANS' NETWORK

The mission of the Women Veterans' Network is to provide women with information on benefits; expand awareness of the needs of women veterans; and identify available health and human resources to meet those needs. Call 617.210.5958.

HOUSING SERVICES

- 1 Homeless prevention** and outreach services include extensive counseling and a network of assistance to veterans and their families who are at-risk of becoming homeless.
- 2 Emergency shelters** provide a safe environment, a bed for the night, meals, bathing facilities, and basic clothing.
- 3 Transitional housing** provides safe housing, a variety of services, and counseling for up to 24 months.
- 4 Permanent housing** is available to single, qualified veterans through various providers. For a complete listing see mass.gov/veterans. A federal program called VASH (VA Supported Housing) provides section 8 vouchers to chronically homeless veterans with substance abuse and/or mental health issues, call the VASH Program Assistant at a VA Medical Center near you.
- 5 Veterans and their families** are given preference for state-aided **public housing** through their local housing authority.