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Moore, Chandler Vote to Protect and Improve Benefits for Veterans and Servicemembers

BOSTON – The Senate on Thursday approved legislation to enhance and protect benefits of Massachusetts' veterans and servicemembers. Senators Michael O. Moore (D-Millbury) and Harriette L. Chandler (D-Worcester) both voted for the legislation.

"I was very proud to cast this vote for our veterans, who have put their lives on the line for our country," said Sen. Moore. "This legislation reflects only a microcosm of what we owe these brave men and women. I am hopeful that this legislation will have a real, positive impact on each of them"

"It is our duty and privilege as legislators to protect those who have given so much to protect us," said Sen. Chandler. "I'm honored and pleased that we are able to pass such an important bill, especially at this symbolic time of year as we recognize our veterans and their service."

The legislation, An Act to Provide Benefits for Veterans and Servicemembers, makes improvements in numerous areas, including voting rights, access to veterans' services, employment and benefits.

"Our veterans and servicemembers make the selfless decision to stand between us and danger, and it is our job to recognize, remember and support their efforts," Senate President Therese Murray (D-Plymouth) said. "This legislation will allow the Commonwealth to ensure that veterans' and servicemembers' rights are protected, service is acknowledged and benefits are accessible."

The Senate's version of the legislation:

- Allows Massachusetts residents serving overseas to receive and return absentee ballots via electronic means for federal, state and local preliminary, primary and general elections;

- Directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to study the Commonwealth's current capacity to provide health care services to veterans, and assess the feasibility of expanding capacity at current soldiers' homes or establishing additional soldiers' homes;
- Authorizes state licensing boards to draft regulations exempting honorably-discharged veterans from requirements or credits towards licensure based on skills accumulated during their military service;
- Includes a preference in the General Laws for service-disabled veterans for public works projects;
- Amends the current Welcome Home Bill bonus program, where service members are currently able to obtain a \$1,000 bonus for a single overseas deployment, to allow servicemembers who are deployed on multiple tours to apply for up to 50 percent of the bonus upon each subsequent return. This additional benefit will only be allowed while current funds remain available;
- Creates a Medal of Liberty for the governor to award to family members of servicemembers killed in action or who died of wounds received in action;
- Allows city and town clerks to provide the list of veterans to the Executive Office of Veteran Affairs and to local veterans' service officers; And,
- Establishes a veterans' hall of fame council to study the feasibility of establishing a veterans' hall of fame in the Commonwealth.

The legislation now returns to the House of Representatives for further action.

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