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Senator Putnam from the Committee on Agriculture, Veterans, Broadband, and Rural Development, to which was referred

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S.F. No. 1959: A bill for an act relating to state government; establishing a budget for the Department of Military Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs; modifying accreditation and disclosure requirements for providers of veterans benefits services to veterans and veterans' families; requiring the commissioner of administration to place a memorial plaque honoring Gold Star and Blue Star families on State Capitol grounds; requiring reports; appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.6091, subdivision 4, by adding subdivisions; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 197.

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Reports the same back with the recommendation that the bill be amended as follows:

1.12

Delete everything after the enacting clause and insert:

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"ARTICLE 1

1.14

MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS

1.15

Section 1. APPROPRIATIONS.

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The sums shown in the columns marked "Appropriations" are appropriated to the agencies and for the purposes specified in this article. The appropriations are from the general fund, or another named fund, and are available for the fiscal years indicated for each purpose. The figures "2026" and "2027" used in this article mean that the appropriations listed under them are available for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, or June 30, 2027, respectively. "The first year" is fiscal year 2026. "The second year" is fiscal year 2027. "The biennium" is fiscal years 2026 and 2027.

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APPROPRIATIONS

1.24

Available for the Year

1.25

Ending June 30

1.26

20262027

1.27

Sec. 2. MILITARY AFFAIRS

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Subdivision 1. Total Appropriation\$26,872,000\$27,081,000

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The amounts that may be spent for each purpose are specified in the following subdivisions.

2.1	<u>Subd. 2. Maintenance of Training Facilities</u>	<u>10,067,000</u>	<u>10,067,000</u>
2.2	<u>Subd. 3. General Support</u>	<u>4,391,000</u>	<u>4,600,000</u>
2.3	<u>Subd. 4. Enlistment Incentives</u>	<u>12,114,000</u>	<u>12,114,000</u>
2.4	<u>The appropriations in this subdivision are</u>		
2.5	<u>available until June 30, 2029.</u>		
2.6	<u>If the amount for fiscal year 2026 is</u>		
2.7	<u>insufficient, the amount for 2027 is available</u>		
2.8	<u>in fiscal year 2026. Any unencumbered</u>		
2.9	<u>balance does not cancel at the end of the first</u>		
2.10	<u>year and is available for the second year.</u>		
2.11	<u>Subd. 5. Emergency Services</u>	<u>300,000</u>	<u>300,000</u>
2.12	<u>Sec. 3. VETERANS AFFAIRS</u>		
2.13	<u>Subdivision 1. Total Appropriation</u>	<u>\$ 141,929,000</u>	<u>\$ 146,700,000</u>
2.14	<u>The base for this appropriation is</u>		
2.15	<u>\$151,130,000 in fiscal year 2028 and each</u>		
2.16	<u>fiscal year thereafter. The amounts that may</u>		
2.17	<u>be spent for each purpose are specified in the</u>		
2.18	<u>following subdivisions.</u>		
2.19	<u>Subd. 2. Veterans Programs and Services</u>	<u>30,677,000</u>	<u>31,080,000</u>
2.20	<u>The amounts that may be spent for each</u>		
2.21	<u>purpose are specified in the following</u>		
2.22	<u>paragraphs.</u>		
2.23	<u>(a) State Veterans Cemeteries. \$3,782,000</u>		
2.24	<u>each year is for the operation of the state</u>		
2.25	<u>veterans cemeteries.</u>		
2.26	<u>(b) Veterans Service Organizations.</u>		
2.27	<u>\$500,000 each year is for grants to the</u>		
2.28	<u>following congressionally chartered veterans</u>		
2.29	<u>service organizations as designated by the</u>		
2.30	<u>commissioner: Disabled American Veterans,</u>		
2.31	<u>Military Order of the Purple Heart, the</u>		
2.32	<u>American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars,</u>		

3.1 Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, and
3.2 Paralyzed Veterans of America. This funding
3.3 must be allocated in direct proportion to the
3.4 funding currently being provided by the
3.5 commissioner to these organizations.

3.6 (c) **Honor Guards.** \$200,000 each year is for
3.7 compensation for honor guards at the funerals
3.8 of veterans under Minnesota Statutes, section
3.9 197.231.

3.10 (d) **Minnesota GI Bill.** \$200,000 each year is
3.11 for the costs of administering the Minnesota
3.12 GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits,
3.13 on-the-job training, and apprenticeship
3.14 program under Minnesota Statutes, section
3.15 197.791.

3.16 (e) **Gold Star Program.** \$100,000 each year
3.17 is for administering the Gold Star Program for
3.18 surviving family members of deceased
3.19 veterans.

3.20 (f) **County Veterans Service Office.**
3.21 \$1,610,000 each year is for the County
3.22 Veterans Service Office grant program under
3.23 Minnesota Statutes, section 197.608. Of this
3.24 amount, \$20,000 is for a women veterans
3.25 technical assistance coordinator, \$20,000 is
3.26 for a veteran suicide prevention technical
3.27 assistance coordinator, and \$20,000 is for a
3.28 justice-involved veteran technical assistance
3.29 coordinator. Any unencumbered balance in
3.30 the first year does not cancel and is available
3.31 in the second year.

3.32 (g) **Camp Bliss.** \$150,000 each year is for a
3.33 grant to Independent Lifestyles, Inc., to
3.34 provide therapy, transportation, and activities

4.1 customized for veterans who are Minnesota
4.2 residents and their spouses, domestic partners,
4.3 and children, at Camp Bliss in the city of
4.4 Walker. The commissioner of veterans affairs
4.5 must report to the chairs and ranking minority
4.6 members of the legislative committees with
4.7 jurisdiction over veterans affairs on:
4.8 (1) the number of veterans and veterans'
4.9 family members served; and
4.10 (2) a detailed explanation of expenditures of
4.11 the grant money.
4.12 **(h) Veteran Resilience Project. \$140,000**
4.13 each year is for a grant to the veteran resilience
4.14 project. Grant funds must be used to make eye
4.15 movement desensitization and reprocessing
4.16 therapy available to veterans, veterans'
4.17 spouses, current military service members,
4.18 and current military service members' spouses
4.19 who are suffering from posttraumatic stress
4.20 disorder and trauma.
4.21 The veteran resilience project must report to
4.22 the commissioner of veterans affairs and the
4.23 chairs and ranking minority members of the
4.24 legislative committees with jurisdiction over
4.25 veterans affairs policy and finance by January
4.26 15 of each year on the program. The report
4.27 must include an overview of the program's
4.28 budget, a detailed explanation of program
4.29 expenditures, the number of veterans and
4.30 service members served by the program, and
4.31 a list and explanation of the services provided
4.32 to program participants.
4.33 **(i) CORE Program. \$1,225,000 each year is**
4.34 for the Counseling and Case Management

- 5.1 Outreach Referral and Education (CORE)
- 5.2 program.
- 5.3 (j) **LinkVet Call Center.** \$369,000 each year
- 5.4 is for the operation of the state's LinkVet Call
- 5.5 Center.
- 5.6 (k) **Recently Separated Veterans Program.**
- 5.7 \$300,000 each year is for operation of the
- 5.8 recently separated veterans program. The
- 5.9 commissioner of veterans affairs may use
- 5.10 Department of Defense and other veteran data
- 5.11 that was provided with an appropriate
- 5.12 disclosure to assist with connecting veterans
- 5.13 to resources and new programming. The
- 5.14 commissioner may use money for personnel,
- 5.15 research, marketing, technology solutions, and
- 5.16 professional or technical contracts.
- 5.17 (l) **Homeless Veterans and SOAR Program.**
- 5.18 \$1,344,000 each year is to operate the
- 5.19 homeless veteran registry and homeless
- 5.20 programs and to assist veterans, former service
- 5.21 members, and veterans' and former service
- 5.22 members' dependents with obtaining federal
- 5.23 benefits through the Social Security
- 5.24 Administration. The commissioner of veterans
- 5.25 affairs may use money for personnel, training,
- 5.26 research, marketing, and professional or
- 5.27 technical contracts.
- 5.28 (m) **Minnesota Assistance Council for**
- 5.29 **Veterans.** \$1,075,000 each year is for grants
- 5.30 to the Minnesota Assistance Council for
- 5.31 Veterans to provide assistance throughout
- 5.32 Minnesota to veterans and veterans' families
- 5.33 who are homeless or in danger of
- 5.34 homelessness, including assistance with:

- 6.1 (1) supportive services to maintain housing;
- 6.2 (2) employment;
- 6.3 (3) legal issues;
- 6.4 (4) housing and housing-related costs;
- 6.5 (5) transportation;
- 6.6 (6) the acquisition and creation of permanent
- 6.7 supportive housing; and
- 6.8 (7) property management of permanent
- 6.9 supportive housing.
- 6.10 Any unencumbered balance remaining in this
- 6.11 paragraph in the first year does not cancel and
- 6.12 is available for the second year. Assistance
- 6.13 authorized under this paragraph must be
- 6.14 provided only to a veteran who has resided in
- 6.15 Minnesota for 30 days prior to the veteran's
- 6.16 application for assistance and according to
- 6.17 other guidelines established by the
- 6.18 commissioner. To avoid duplication of
- 6.19 services, the commissioner must ensure that
- 6.20 this assistance is coordinated with all other
- 6.21 available programs for veterans.
- 6.22 **(n) Minnesota Military and Veterans**
- 6.23 **Museum.** \$300,000 each year is for a grant to
- 6.24 the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum
- 6.25 for museum staff to provide direct services to
- 6.26 veterans and their families.
- 6.27 **(o) Veteran Homelessness Initiative.**
- 6.28 \$1,311,000 each year is for an initiative to
- 6.29 prevent and end veteran homelessness.
- 6.30 Subd. 3. **Veterans Health Care**
- 6.31 (a) \$110,302,000 the first year and
- 6.32 \$114,670,000 the second year may be

111,252,000115,620,000

7.1 transferred to a veterans homes special
7.2 revenue account in the special revenue fund
7.3 in the same manner as other receipts are
7.4 deposited according to Minnesota Statutes,
7.5 section 198.34, and are appropriated to the
7.6 commissioner of veterans affairs for the
7.7 operation of veterans homes facilities and
7.8 programs. The base for this transfer is
7.9 \$119,100,000 in fiscal year 2028 and each
7.10 fiscal year thereafter.

7.11 (b) The department shall seek opportunities
7.12 to maximize federal reimbursements of
7.13 Medicare-eligible expenses and provide annual
7.14 reports to the commissioner of management
7.15 and budget on the federal Medicare
7.16 reimbursements that are received. Contingent
7.17 upon future federal Medicare receipts,
7.18 reductions to the veterans homes' general fund
7.19 appropriation may be made.

7.20 (c) \$400,000 each year is for the department
7.21 to staff Veteran Community Health Navigators
7.22 in community-based hospitals.

7.23 (d) \$550,000 each year is for the department
7.24 to operate the veteran suicide prevention
7.25 program.

7.26 ARTICLE 2

7.27 VETERANS POLICY

7.28 Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 13.461, subdivision 27, is amended to read:

7.29 Subd. 27. ~~State soldiers assistance program~~ Veterans affairs programs. Access to
7.30 information for purposes of verifying eligibility for the State Soldiers Assistance Program,
7.31 the Veterans Stable Housing Initiative, and the Veterans Programs Division is governed by
7.32 section 197.065.

8.1 Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 193.143, is amended to read:

8.2 **193.143 STATE ARMORY BUILDING COMMISSION, POWERS.**

8.3 Such corporation, subject to the conditions and limitations prescribed in sections 193.141
8.4 to 193.149, shall possess all the powers of a body corporate necessary and convenient to
8.5 accomplish the objectives and perform the duties prescribed by sections 193.141 to 193.149,
8.6 including the following, which shall not be construed as a limitation upon the general powers
8.7 hereby conferred:

8.8 (1) To acquire by lease, purchase, gift, or condemnation proceedings all necessary right,
8.9 title, and interest in and to the lands required for a site for a new armory and all other real
8.10 or personal property required for the purposes contemplated by the Military Code and to
8.11 hold and dispose of the same, subject to the conditions and limitations herein prescribed;
8.12 provided that any such real or personal property or interest therein may be so acquired or
8.13 accepted subject to any condition which may be imposed thereon by the grantor or donor
8.14 and agreed to by such corporation not inconsistent with the proper use of such property by
8.15 the state for armory or military purposes as herein provided.

8.16 (2) To exercise the power of eminent domain in the manner provided by chapter 117,
8.17 for the purpose of acquiring any property which such corporation is herein authorized to
8.18 acquire by condemnation; provided, that the corporation may take possession of any such
8.19 property so to be acquired at any time after the filing of the petition describing the same in
8.20 condemnation proceedings; provided further, that this shall not preclude the corporation
8.21 from abandoning the condemnation of any such property in any case where possession
8.22 thereof has not been taken.

8.23 (3) To construct and equip new armories as authorized herein; to pay therefor out of the
8.24 funds obtained as hereinafter provided and to hold, manage, and dispose of such armory,
8.25 equipment, and site as hereinafter provided. The total amount of bonds issued on account
8.26 of such armories shall not exceed the amount of the cost thereof; provided also, that the
8.27 total bonded indebtedness of the commission shall not at any time exceed the aggregate
8.28 sum of ~~\$15,000,000~~ \$45,000,000.

8.29 (4) To provide partnerships with federal and state governments and to match federal and
8.30 local funds, when available.

8.31 (5) To sue and be sued.

8.32 (6) To contract and be contracted with in any matter connected with any purpose or
8.33 activity within the powers of such corporations as herein specified; provided, that no officer

9.1 or member of such corporation shall be personally interested, directly or indirectly, in any
9.2 contract in which such corporation is interested.

9.3 (7) To employ any and all professional and nonprofessional services and all agents,
9.4 employees, workers, and servants necessary and proper for the purposes and activities of
9.5 such corporation as authorized or contemplated herein and to pay for the same out of any
9.6 portion of the income of the corporation available for such purposes or activities. The officers
9.7 and members of such corporation shall not receive any compensation therefrom, but may
9.8 receive their reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with the performance
9.9 of their duties; provided however, that whenever the duties of any member of the commission
9.10 require full time and attention the commission may compensate the member therefor at such
9.11 rates as it may determine.

9.12 (8) To borrow money and issue bonds for the purposes and in the manner and within
9.13 the limitations herein specified, and to pledge any and all property and income of such
9.14 corporation acquired or received as herein provided to secure the payment of such bonds,
9.15 subject to the provisions and limitations herein prescribed, and to redeem any such bonds
9.16 if so provided therein or in the mortgage or trust deed accompanying the same.

9.17 (9) To use for the following purposes any available money received by such corporation
9.18 from any source as herein provided in excess of those required for the payment of the cost
9.19 of such armory and for the payment of any bonds issued by the corporation and interest
9.20 thereon according to the terms of such bonds or of any mortgage or trust deed accompanying
9.21 the same:

9.22 (a) to pay the necessary incidental expenses of carrying on the business and activities
9.23 of the corporation as herein authorized;

9.24 (b) to pay the cost of operating, maintaining, repairing, and improving such new armories;

9.25 (c) if any further excess money remains, to purchase upon the open market at or above
9.26 or below the face or par value thereof any bonds issued by the corporation as herein
9.27 authorized, provided that any bonds so purchased shall thereupon be canceled.

9.28 (10) To adopt and use a corporate seal.

9.29 (11) To adopt all needful bylaws and rules for the conduct of business and affairs of
9.30 such corporation and for the management and use of all armories while under the ownership
9.31 and control of such corporation as herein provided, not inconsistent with the use of such
9.32 armory for armory or military purposes.

9.33 (12) Such corporation shall issue no stock.

10.1 (13) No officer or member of such corporation shall have any personal share or interest
10.2 in any funds or property of the corporation or be subject to any personal liability by reason
10.3 of any liability of the corporation.

10.4 (14) The Minnesota State Armory Building Commission created under section 193.142
10.5 shall keep all money and credits received by it as a single fund, to be designated as the
10.6 "Minnesota State Armory Building Commission fund," with separate accounts for each
10.7 armory; and the commission may make transfers of money from funds appertaining to any
10.8 armory under its control for use for any other such armory; provided such transfers shall
10.9 be made only from money on hand, from time to time, in excess of the amounts required
10.10 to meet payments of interest or principal on bonds or other obligations appertaining to the
10.11 armory to which such funds pertain and only when necessary to pay expenses of construction,
10.12 operation, maintenance, debt service, and other obligations reasonable and necessary, of
10.13 such other armory; provided further, no such transfer of any money paid for the support of
10.14 any armory by the municipality in which such armory is situated shall be made by the
10.15 commission.

10.16 (15) The corporation created under section 193.142 may designate one or more state or
10.17 national banks as depositories of its funds, and may provide, upon such conditions as the
10.18 corporation may determine, that the treasurer of the corporation shall be exempt from
10.19 personal liability for loss of funds deposited in any such depository due to the insolvency
10.20 or other acts or omissions of such depository.

10.21 (16) The governor is empowered to apply for grants of money, equipment, and materials
10.22 which may be made available to the states by the federal government for leasing, building,
10.23 and equipping armories for the use of the military forces of the state which are reserve
10.24 components of the armed forces of the United States, whenever the governor is satisfied
10.25 that the conditions under which such grants are offered by the federal government, are for
10.26 the best interests of the state and are not inconsistent with the laws of the state relating to
10.27 armories, and to accept such grants in the name of the state. The Minnesota State Armory
10.28 Building Commission is designated as the agency of the state to receive such grants and to
10.29 use them for armory purposes as prescribed in this chapter, and by federal laws, and
10.30 regulations not inconsistent therewith.

10.31 Sec. 3. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.065, is amended to read:

10.32 **197.065 ACCESS TO DATABASE.**

10.33 (a) Notwithstanding section 13.46, subdivision 2, the commissioner of veterans affairs
10.34 may electronically access the MAXIS database maintained by the Department of Human

11.1 ~~Services~~ Children, Youth, and Families for the purpose of verifying eligibility status of
11.2 applicants for benefits under the State Soldiers Assistance Program, the Veterans Stable
11.3 Housing Initiative, and the Veterans Programs Division. The commissioner may electronically
11.4 access the MAXIS database to ensure that veterans are connected to all available state and
11.5 federal resources for which the veterans are eligible.

11.6 (b) In order to access any private data on individuals, as defined by section 13.02,
11.7 subdivision 12, pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section, the commissioner of veterans
11.8 affairs must have received informed consent from the subject of that data.

11.9 Sec. 4. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.236, subdivision 8, is amended to read:

11.10 Subd. 8. **Eligibility.** Cemeteries must be operated solely for the burial of service members
11.11 who die on active duty, eligible veterans, and their spouses and dependent children, as
11.12 defined in United States Code, title 38, section ~~404~~ 2402, paragraph ~~(2)~~ (a), subparagraphs
11.13 1 to 5 and 7.

11.14 Sec. 5. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.236, subdivision 9, is amended to read:

11.15 Subd. 9. **Burial fees.** (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs shall establish a fee
11.16 schedule, which may be adjusted from time to time, for the interment of eligible spouses
11.17 and dependent children. The fees shall cover as nearly as practicable the actual costs of
11.18 interment, excluding the value of the plot.

11.19 (b) Upon application, the commissioner may waive or reduce the burial fee for an indigent
11.20 eligible person. The commissioner shall ~~develop~~ maintain a policy, eligibility standards,
11.21 and application form for requests to waive or reduce the burial fee to indigent eligible
11.22 applicants.

11.23 (c) No plot or interment fees may be charged for the burial of service members who die
11.24 on active duty or eligible veterans, as defined in United States Code, title 38, section ~~404~~ 2402,
11.25 paragraph (2) (a), subparagraphs 1 to 4 and 7.

11.26 Sec. 6. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.608, subdivision 6, is amended to read:

11.27 Subd. 6. **Grant amount.** (a) Each county is eligible to receive an annual grant of \$7,500
11.28 for the following purposes:

11.29 (1) to provide outreach to the county's veterans;

11.30 (2) to assist in the reintegration of combat veterans into society;

12.1 (3) to collaborate with other social service agencies, educational institutions, and other
12.2 community organizations for the purposes of enhancing services offered to veterans;

12.3 (4) to reduce homelessness among veterans; and

12.4 (5) to enhance the operations of the county veterans service office.

12.5 (b) In addition to the grant amount in paragraph (a), each county is eligible to receive
12.6 an additional annual grant under this paragraph. The amount of each additional annual grant
12.7 must be determined by the commissioner and may not exceed:

12.8 (1) \$0, if the county's veteran population is less than 1,000;

12.9 (2) \$2,500, if the county's veteran population is 1,000 or more but less than 3,000;

12.10 (3) \$5,000, if the county's veteran population is 3,000 or more but less than 5,000;

12.11 (4) \$7,500, if the county's veteran population is 5,000 or more but less than 10,000;

12.12 (5) \$10,000, if the county's veteran population is 10,000 or more but less than 20,000;

12.13 (6) \$15,000, if the county's veteran population is 20,000 or more but less than 30,000;

12.14 or

12.15 (7) \$20,000, if the county's veteran population is 30,000 or more.

12.16 (c) The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers is eligible to receive
12.17 an annual grant of ~~\$100,000~~ \$160,000. The grant ~~shall~~ must be used for administrative costs
12.18 of the association, certification of mandated county veterans service officer training and
12.19 accreditation, and costs associated with reintegration services. Up to \$60,000 of this amount
12.20 may be used to train technical assistance coordinators and for technical assistance
12.21 coordinators to travel to consult with Minnesota counties on specific areas of expertise upon
12.22 request. The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers executive board
12.23 must select technical assistance coordinators, who are either county veterans service officers
12.24 or assistant county veterans service officers, to serve for a minimum of one year.

12.25 (d) The veteran population of each county shall be determined by the figure supplied
12.26 by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, as adopted by the commissioner.

12.27 Sec. 7. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.6091, is amended to read:

12.28 **197.6091 VETERANS BENEFITS SERVICES; DISCLOSURE AND**
12.29 **ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS.**

12.30 Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** (a) For purposes of this section, the following terms have
12.31 the meanings given.

13.1 (b)(1) "Advertising" or "advertisement" means any of the following:

13.2 (i) any written or printed communication made for the purpose of soliciting business for
13.3 veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeal services, including but not limited to
13.4 a brochure, letter, pamphlet, newspaper, telephone listing, periodical, or other writing;

13.5 (ii) any directory listing caused or permitted by a person and made available by that
13.6 person indicating that veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeal services are
13.7 being offered; or

13.8 (iii) any radio, television, computer network, or similar airwave or electronic transmission
13.9 that solicits business for or promotes a person offering veterans benefits services, or veterans
13.10 benefits appeal services.

13.11 (2) "Advertising" or "advertisement" does not include any of the following:

13.12 (i) any printing or writing used on buildings, uniforms, or badges, where the purpose of
13.13 the writing is for identification; or

13.14 (ii) any printing or writing in a memorandum or other communication used in the ordinary
13.15 course of business where the sole purpose of the writing is other than soliciting business
13.16 for veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeal services.

13.17 (c) "Benefit" means any payment, service, commodity, function, status, or entitlement
13.18 to which is determined under laws administered by the United States Department of Veterans
13.19 Affairs pertaining to veterans, dependents, and survivors.

13.20 (d) "Claim" means an application made under United States Code, title 38, and
13.21 implementing directives, for entitlement to United States Department of Veterans Affairs
13.22 benefits, reinstatement, continuation, or increase of benefits, or the defense of a proposed
13.23 agency adverse action concerning benefits.

13.24 (e) "Claimant" means a veteran, dependent, or other appropriate person with a claim for
13.25 benefits from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

13.26 (f) "Compensation" means payment of money, a thing of value, or a financial benefit.

13.27 (g) "Recognition" means certification by the United States Department of Veterans
13.28 Affairs of organizations to assist claimants in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution
13.29 of claims for benefits.

13.30 (h) "Person" means an individual, agency, government or governmental subdivision,
13.31 government employee, veterans service organization, corporation, business trust, estate,

14.1 trust, partnership, limited liability company, association, joint venture, public corporation,
14.2 instrumentality, or any other legal or commercial entity.

14.3 (i) "Practice of law" means legal representation, legal services, legal advice, legal
14.4 consultations, preparation of legal documents, or other legal activities provided by a licensed
14.5 attorney.

14.6 (j) "Representation" means the acts associated with representing a claimant in a
14.7 proceeding before VA pursuant to a properly executed and filed VA Form 21-22
14.8 (Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant's Representative) or VA Form
14.9 21-22a (Appointment of Individual as Claimant's Representative).

14.10 (k) "VA accreditation" means the federal credentialing process required pursuant to
14.11 United States Code, title 38, section 5904, by the United States Department of Veterans
14.12 Affairs for representatives of veterans at the agency. Accreditation is not required for
14.13 representation in federal courts.

14.14 (l) "VA-accredited representative" means a person recognized by the United States
14.15 Department of Veterans Affairs under Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 14.629,
14.16 including, but not limited to, VA-accredited attorneys, claims agents, government employees,
14.17 and representatives of veterans service organizations.

14.18 (m) "Veterans benefits appeal services" means services that a veteran might reasonably
14.19 require in order to appeal a denial of federal or state veterans benefits provided after an
14.20 initial claim decision is made by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, including
14.21 but not limited to denials of disability, limited income, home loan, insurance, education and
14.22 training, burial and memorial, and dependent and survivor benefits.

14.23 ~~(d)~~ (n) "Veterans benefits services" means services that a veteran or a family member
14.24 of a veteran might reasonably use in order to obtain federal, state, or county veterans benefits.

14.25 ~~(e)~~ (o) "Written disclosure statement" means the written disclosure statement developed
14.26 by the commissioner of veterans affairs pursuant to section 196.05, subdivision 1.

14.27 **Subd. 2. Advertising disclosure requirements.** A person advertising veterans benefits
14.28 appeal services must conspicuously disclose in the advertisement, in similar type size or
14.29 voice-over, that veterans benefits appeal services are also offered at no cost by county
14.30 veterans service officers under sections 197.603 and 197.604. This subdivision does not
14.31 apply to an attorney accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs under
14.32 Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 14.629.

Subd. 3. **Veterans benefits services disclosure requirements.** A person who provides veterans benefits services in exchange for compensation shall provide a written disclosure statement to each client or prospective client. Before a person enters into an agreement to provide veterans benefits services or accepts ~~money or any other thing of value~~ compensation for the provision of veterans benefits services, the person must obtain the signature of the client on a written disclosure statement containing an attestation by the client that the client has read and understands the written disclosure statement. This subdivision does not apply to an attorney accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs under Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 14.629.

Subd. 3a. **Federal accreditation; other requirements.** (a) A person who provides veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeals services, in exchange for compensation must be accredited by the secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs under United States Code, title 38, chapter 59.

(b) A person may not make a referral for compensation of claimant to a provider of veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeals services, unless they are accredited by the secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs except as permitted under United States Code, title 38, chapter 59.

(c) A person subject to an accreditation requirement under paragraph (a), and who provides veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeals services, may charge a veteran or a family member of a veteran a fee or other form of compensation only as provided in Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 14.636.

(d) Before providing veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeals services, a person must provide a veteran or a family member of a veteran a written fee agreement that complies with Code of Federal Regulations, title 38, section 14.636, memorializing all terms regarding payment of fees, and signed by both parties.

(e) A person shall not engage in the practice of law where it concerns veterans, in the preparation, presentation, or prosecution for veterans benefits before the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, except if the person is a VA-accredited representative.

(f) A person seeking compensation in connection with a veterans benefit service or veterans benefit appeal service must:

(1) not use a veteran's personal login, username, or password information to access the veteran's medical, financial, or government benefits information; and

(2) ensure that any individual who has access to a veteran's medical or financial information undergoes a background check prior to having access to that information. The background check must be conducted by a reputable source and include identity verification and a criminal records check.

Subd. 3b. **Guarantee of benefits prohibited.** A person providing veterans benefits services, or veterans benefits appeals services, in exchange for compensation, must not guarantee, either directly or by implication, that a veteran or a family member of a veteran is certain to receive specific federal, state, or county veterans benefits or any specific level, percentage, or amount of federal, state, or county veterans benefits.

~~Subd. 4. **Violations; penalties.** A person who fails to comply with this section is subject to a civil penalty not to exceed \$1,000 for each violation. Civil penalties shall be assessed by the district court in an action initiated by the attorney general. For the purposes of computing the amount of each civil penalty, each day of a continuing violation constitutes a separate violation. Additionally, the attorney general may accept a civil penalty as determined by the attorney general in settlement of an investigation of a violation of this section regardless of whether an action has been filed under this section~~ A violation of this section is an unlawful practice under section 325F.69. Any civil penalty recovered shall be deposited in the Support Our Troops account established under section 190.19.

Subd. 5. **Nonapplicability.** This section does not apply to the owner or personnel of any medium in which an advertisement appears or through which an advertisement is disseminated.

Sec. 8. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.75, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of veterans affairs.

(c) "Deceased veteran" means a veteran who has died as a result of the person's military service, as determined by the United States Veterans Administration, and who was a resident of this state: (1) within six months of entering the United States armed forces, or (2) for the six months preceding the veteran's date of death.

(d) "Eligible child" means a person who:

(1) is the natural or adopted child or stepchild of a deceased veteran; and

(2) is a student making satisfactory academic progress at an eligible institution of higher education.

(e) "Eligible institution" means a postsecondary educational institution located in this state that either is operated by this state or the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota, or is licensed or registered with the Office of Higher Education.

(f) "Eligible spouse" means the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran, regardless of whether the surviving spouse remarries.

(g) "Eligible veteran" means a veteran who:

(1) is a student making satisfactory academic progress at an eligible institution of higher education;

(2) had Minnesota as the person's state of residence at the time of the person's enlistment or any reenlistment into the United States armed forces, as shown by the person's federal form DD-214 or other official documentation to the satisfaction of the commissioner;

(3) except for benefits under this section, has no remaining military or veteran-related educational assistance benefits for which the person may have been entitled; and

(4) while using the educational assistance authorized in this section, remains a resident student as defined in section 136A.101, subdivision 8.

(h) "Satisfactory academic progress" has the meaning given in section 136A.101, subdivision 10.

(i) "Student" has the meaning given in section 136A.101, subdivision 7.

(j) "Veteran" has the meaning given in section 197.447.

Sec. 9. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.791, subdivision 4, is amended to read:

Subd. 4. **Eligibility.** (a) A person is eligible for educational assistance under subdivision 5 if:

(1) the person is:

(i) a veteran who is serving or has served honorably in any branch or unit of the United States armed forces at any time;

(ii) a nonveteran who has served honorably for a total of five years or more cumulatively as a member of the Minnesota National Guard or any other active or reserve component of the United States armed forces, and any part of that service occurred on or after September 11, 2001;

(iii) the surviving spouse, regardless of whether the surviving spouse remarries, or child of a person who has served in the military and who has died as a direct result of that military

18.1 service, only if the surviving spouse or child is eligible to receive federal education benefits
18.2 under United States Code, title 38, chapter 33, as amended, or United States Code, title 38,
18.3 chapter 35, as amended; or

18.4 (iv) the spouse or child of a person who has served in the military at any time and who
18.5 has a total and permanent service-connected disability as rated by the United States Veterans
18.6 Administration, only if the spouse or child is eligible to receive federal education benefits
18.7 under United States Code, title 38, chapter 33, as amended, or United States Code, title 38,
18.8 chapter 35, as amended; and

18.9 (2) the person receiving the educational assistance is a Minnesota resident, as defined
18.10 in section 136A.101, subdivision 8; and

18.11 (3) the person receiving the educational assistance:

18.12 (i) is an undergraduate or graduate student at an eligible institution;

18.13 (ii) is maintaining satisfactory academic progress as defined by the institution for students
18.14 participating in federal Title IV programs;

18.15 (iii) is enrolled in an education program leading to a certificate, diploma, or degree at
18.16 an eligible institution;

18.17 (iv) has applied for educational assistance under this section prior to the end of the
18.18 academic term for which the assistance is being requested;

18.19 (v) is in compliance with child support payment requirements under section 136A.121,
18.20 subdivision 2, clause (5); and

18.21 (vi) has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

18.22 (b) A person's eligibility terminates when the person becomes eligible for benefits under
18.23 section 135A.52.

18.24 (c) To determine eligibility, the commissioner may require official documentation,
18.25 including the person's federal form DD-214 or other official military discharge papers;
18.26 correspondence from the United States Veterans Administration; birth certificate; marriage
18.27 certificate; proof of enrollment at an eligible institution; signed affidavits; proof of residency;
18.28 proof of identity; or any other official documentation the commissioner considers necessary
18.29 to determine eligibility.

18.30 (d) The commissioner may deny eligibility or terminate benefits under this section to
18.31 any person who has not provided sufficient documentation to determine eligibility for the
18.32 program. An applicant may appeal the commissioner's eligibility determination or termination

of benefits in writing to the commissioner at any time. The commissioner must rule on any application or appeal within 30 days of receipt of all documentation that the commissioner requires. The decision of the commissioner regarding an appeal is final. However, an applicant whose appeal of an eligibility determination has been rejected by the commissioner may submit an additional appeal of that determination in writing to the commissioner at any time that the applicant is able to provide substantively significant additional information regarding the applicant's eligibility for the program. An approval of an applicant's eligibility by the commissioner following an appeal by the applicant is not retroactively effective for more than one year or the semester of the person's original application, whichever is later.

(e) Upon receiving an application with insufficient documentation to determine eligibility, the commissioner must notify the applicant within 30 days of receipt of the application that the application is being suspended pending receipt by the commissioner of sufficient documentation from the applicant to determine eligibility.

Sec. 10. GOLD STAR AND BLUE STAR FAMILIES; MEMORIAL PLAQUE.

The commissioner of administration shall place a memorial plaque in the court of honor on State Capitol grounds to recognize the service and sacrifices of Minnesota's Gold Star and Blue Star families. The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board must solicit design submissions from the public. The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board shall select a design from the submitted designs to use as a basis for final production. The selected design must be approved by the commissioner of veterans affairs and must be furnished by the person or group who submitted the design at no cost to the state."

Amend the title as follows:

Page 1, line 5, after the semicolon, insert "modifying veterans services and benefits provisions;"

Amend the title numbers accordingly

And when so amended the bill do pass and be re-referred to the Committee on Finance.
Amendments adopted. Report adopted.


.....
(Committee Chair)

April 4, 2025.....
(Date of Committee recommendation)