



# *The HERO Act – Fact Sheet*

## *Healey-Driscoll Administration*

An Act Honoring, Empowering, and Recognizing Our Servicemembers and Veterans (The HERO Act) proposes the following 17 spending and policy initiatives, tax credits, and statute changes organized into three buckets:

- Benefit Expansion
- Commitment to Inclusivity and Greater Representation
- Modernization of Veterans Services

### **Benefit Expansion**

**Increase the EOVS Disabled Veteran Annuity:** Increases the annual annuity paid from \$2,000 to \$2,500, phased in over two fiscal years.

**Expanding Veteran Access to Behavioral Health Treatment:** Allows veterans on Chapter 115 to be reimbursed for outpatient behavioral health care visits.

**Increases the Vet-Hire Tax Credit:** Increases to \$2,500 a tax credit for small businesses hiring chronically unemployed or low-income veterans. Eligible veterans include those receiving SNAP benefits, chronically unemployed veterans, and unemployed service-connected disabled veterans.

**Expanding Veteran Property Tax Exemptions:** Creates two ways for municipalities to increase property exemptions for veterans. The first would create a mechanism for municipalities to more easily double the current exemption for veterans. The second ties the annual property tax abatement amount to inflation, allowing exempted property tax amounts to increase with inflation.

**Increase access to the Active-Duty Buyback program:** This provision lengthens the timeframe for veterans to participate in the Active-Duty Service Buyback program from 180 days to 10 years and provides a retroactive grace period for veteran state employees who missed this opportunity.

**Prevent the COLA cliff:** Ensures that veterans receiving federal benefits do not lose access to Chapter 115 benefits because of COLA increases to existing benefits.

**Expand Veteran Motor Vehicle Benefits:** Waives license plate fees on specialty veteran license plates and creates a new woman veteran license plate decal. Additionally, the proposal streamlines eligible disabled/Purple Heart veteran access to motor vehicle benefits.

### **Commitment to Inclusivity**

**Broaden the Chapter 115 Definition of a veteran:** Better aligns the state Chapter 115 program definition of a veteran with the federal definition. This change allows more Massachusetts veterans to be eligible for the annuity, Chapter 115 benefits, access to the Massachusetts Veterans Homes, and other state benefits. This only applies to EOVS programs and does not affect any other agency or entity.



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**Expand the scope of the Veterans Equality Review Board (VERB):** Expands the VERB’s charge to cover additional protected classes (including race, color, religious creed, national origin, age, and disability).

**Update the definition of a veteran dependent:** Aligns the definition of a veteran dependent with the standard definition of a dependent used by the Probate and Family Court.

**Support same-sex couples who have been denied IVF reimbursement by the Veterans Health Administration:** Creates a pilot program to support same-sex women veterans who have been denied this VA benefit. Additionally, the proposal establishes a working group of stakeholders to study and identify other potential areas of discrimination related to veteran care in Massachusetts.

#### **Modernization of Veterans Services**

**Modernize statutory language for inclusivity and standardization:** The legislation would shift to gender-neutral language and eliminate references to wars or campaigns that no longer apply to the program, including the Civil War and the Cuban Pacification Campaign of 1906.

**Align the veteran residential requirement length for Chapter 115 eligibility with current practice:** Under the original statute, veteran dependents were required to live in Massachusetts for at least 3 years to be eligible for veteran benefits. An EOVS directive changed this practice to reduce the residency time from 3 years to one day. This proposal codifies current practice.

**Study the use of alternative therapies for mental health disorders among veterans:** Creates a public-private working group to study the health benefits of psychedelics as treatment for veterans suffering from physical or mental health disorders related to their service.

**Provide clear statutory authority for dental assistance benefits:** This bill codifies EOVS’s authority to provide certain dental benefits.

**Provide clear statutory authority for medical assistance programs:** This bill codifies EOVS’s authority to provide certain medical benefits.

**Provide clear statutory authority for operation of the Veterans Cemeteries:** This bill codifies EOVS’s authority to operate both Massachusetts Memorial Veterans cemeteries.