



Office of
Representative Hannah E. Kane
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 23, 2024

CONTACT: Kerry Shea, 617-722-2810

Representative Kane supports HERO Act to expand benefits for Massachusetts veterans and servicemembers

BOSTON – Just days before Memorial Day, State Representative Hannah Kane (R-Shrewsbury) joined with her colleagues to pass legislation that would expand benefits for the Commonwealth’s veterans and servicemembers.

House Bill 4661, *An Act honoring, empowering, and recognizing our servicemembers and veterans*, also known as the HERO Act, was engrossed by the House of Representatives on a vote of 156-0 on May 22. The bill is a redrafted version of legislation originally filed by Governor Maura Healey as House Bill 4172 on November 9.

According to Representative Kane, the HERO Act addresses a wide range of programs available to veterans, from annuities and property tax abatements to employment and medical assistance benefits.

For example, the House bill proposes an increase in the annual annuities paid to disabled veterans and their dependents. Currently set at \$2,000, this annuity would increase to \$2,250 on July 1, 2024 and to \$2,500 on July 1, 2025. Representative Kane noted the bill also contains language allowing cities and towns to voluntarily provide eligible veterans with annual increases in their property tax abatements in an amount equal to the cost of living as determined by the Consumer Price Index.

To encourage more employers to hire veterans, the HERO Act increases the Work Opportunity Credit available to eligible partnerships, LLCs, and other legal entities from \$2,000 to \$2,500 for each veteran hired, while also increasing the excise tax credit available to businesses under the Work Opportunity Credit by the same amount.

Representative Kane said the bill also requires retirement systems to inform veterans of the availability of creditable service for their military service upon entry into a public service position. Under the HERO Act, veterans who are members of a retirement system and failed to purchase creditable service will be given a 1-time option to purchase their creditable service within 1 year.

To assist veterans with their medical, behavioral health, and dental care, the HERO Act ensures coverage of any costs remaining after all private, state, and federal benefits have been utilized. Representative Kane noted the bill also creates a working group to study alternative therapies for mental health treatments for veterans, including psychedelic therapy, with a report and recommendations due by January 1, 2025.

In addition to waiving all veterans and Gold Star Families license plate fees, the HERO Act also takes steps to ensure that veterans are not deemed ineligible for service-related benefits due to an increase in their income as a result of a cost-of-living adjustment made to their Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or Social Security Disability Insurance in the year that the cost-of-living adjustment is issued.

Representative Kane said the HERO Act requires that Massachusetts veterans and servicemembers be notified of their eligibility to participate in the Department of Veterans Affairs Burn Pits Registry. It also established a

state database to help ensure proper communication with self-identifying veterans and servicemembers who were exposed to toxic airborne chemicals and fumes caused by open burn pits or other airborne hazards.

During floor debate, several amendments were adopted by the House with the support of Representative Kane, including proposals to:

- Include language on the Medal of Liberty application informing those who are approved for the medal that they are automatically eligible for the Medal of Liberty license plate, which was established in 2022;
- Require the Registrar of Motor Vehicles, in consultation with the Adjutant General of the Massachusetts National Guard, to notify all past recipients of the Medal of Liberty that they are eligible for the Medal of Liberty license plate;
- Allow the Gaming Commission, with the approval of a local licensing authority, to issue a limited slot machine gaming license to certain veterans organizations to operate up to 5 slot machines;
- Allow the Department of Public Health to grant a waiver to veterans or military medics applying to be an emergency medical technician (EMT) if their completed training or courses required by the United States armed forces are substantially equivalent to the training required by the state for EMTs;
- Require that the flag of the Commonwealth be flown at half-staff in the event of the death of a military member who is killed in active duty, or if the remains of a POW or MIA are repatriated in the Commonwealth; and annually on national POW/MIA recognition day; and
- Require that the Secretary of Veterans' Services, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, create a notice regarding the resources and benefits available to veterans to be posted by employers with more than 50 employees.

House Bill 4661, as amended, now moves to the Senate for its consideration.

###