



Military & Veterans

During the 2018 legislative session, the General Assembly considered measures related to military and veterans, including their education, employment, and involvement in the criminal justice system. Other legislation addressed veterans' benefits and federal issues concerning Colorado.

Criminal Justice

House Bill 18-1078 addresses court programs for veterans and military members. It requires courts to identify defendants who are serving in the military or are veterans and notify them that they may be entitled to certain services, such as treatment for mental health or substance use disorders. It also sets procedures for the establishment of veterans court programs and requires the favorable consideration of record sealing requests from veterans who have completed certain treatment programs.

The Colorado Code of Military Justice is the legal framework governing the Colorado National Guard, in the same way the Uniform Code of Military Justice applies to the military branches. *Senate Bill 18-135* modernizes the code, including definitions and sentencing provisions; redefines allowable fine amounts; and authorizes certain levels of command to initiate a court martial.

Education

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) determines the level of attainment of each

public school and district based on four performance indicators, one of which is postsecondary workforce readiness. *Senate Bill 18-012* requires CDE to calculate the percentage of high school graduates who enlist in the military, and weight that enlistment equally with postsecondary enrollment when calculating the postsecondary workforce readiness indicator.

Senate Bill 18-087 grants in-state tuition status to refugees and certain special immigrants, including those who served as translators with the U.S. Armed Forces in Iraq or Afghanistan.

House Bill 18-1228 creates the Higher Education for Military Services Act to provide greater transparency for military benefits available in higher education. The act repeals and relocates higher education statutes related to the military to locate them in the same article wherever practicable, with no substantive changes to these statutes.

Employment

House Bill 18-1343 continues the Veterans' Service-to-Career Grant Program through January 1, 2024. The program was created as a pilot by House Bill 16-1267. In the pilot program, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) utilized a grant program to select workforce centers, which partnered with nonprofit agencies, to provide eligible participants with skills training, internships, work placement, career and

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professional counseling, and other related support services. In addition to extending the program's timeframe, HB18-1343 expands eligibility for program services to include persons actively serving in the U.S. Armed Forces and within six months of discharge and members of the National Guard or Reserves who have completed initial entry training. The bill also requires CDLE to develop an evaluation process for the effectiveness of the program.

House Bill 18-1095 changes eligibility requirements for spouses of active military personnel seeking a Colorado teaching license. Teachers who hold a license in another state can receive a Colorado teaching license if they have three years of teaching experience. Prior to this bill, the three years had to be continuous; under the bill, it can be any three years within the previous seven years. *House Bill 18-1130* extends this change to any teacher or special services provider holding a comparable license in another state, rather than only military spouses.

As passed by the Senate, *Senate Bill 18-044* would have allowed private employers to give preference to veterans when hiring, promoting, and retaining employees as long as the veterans are equally as qualified as other individuals. The House of Representatives amended the bill to require a study as to whether or not the General Assembly should enact legislation encouraging veterans' preferences for private employers. The bill was deemed lost after the Senate voted to adhere to its position.

Senate Bill 18-112, which was postponed indefinitely, would have created the Veterans Outdoor Terrain Restoration and Recreation Mental Health Grant Program in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The program would have provided grants to organizations that provide services for veterans to engage in outdoor restoration or recreation

activities to ensure the health and well-being of the participants.

Veterans' Benefits

House Bill 18-1060 allows a state income tax deduction for military retirement benefits received by individuals under age 55, available for tax years 2019 through 2023 and with a cap on the maximum deduction. The cap is \$4,500 for 2019, increasing to \$15,000 by 2022. All qualifying taxpayers aged 55 to 64 could already deduct up to \$20,000 in retirement income, from both military and non-military sources.

House Bill 18-1337 creates a veterans' one-stop center in Grand Junction, operated by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, for the purpose of providing a central and accessible location where veterans, service members, and their family members in the western portion of the state may have access to assistance and resources.

House Bill 18-1218 expands the sales and use tax exemption for veterans' charitable organizations to include regular activities of these organizations, instead of only their events, meetings, or other functions.

Senate Bill 18-157, which was postponed indefinitely, would have created a state Women Veterans Office and Steering Committee in the Office of the Governor.

State-Federal Relations

Senate Joint Memorial 18-003 encourages the U.S. Congress to approve and fund a new Veterans Administration hospital in southern Colorado. *Senate Joint Resolution 18-005* approves the installation of a bronze sculpture of the crest of the U.S.S. Colorado submarine and accompanying explanatory plaque in the State Capitol Building.

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License Plates

The General Assembly considered three bills related to specialty military license plates in 2018. *House Bill 18-1361* extends the end date to be eligible for Vietnam Veteran plates from January 27, 1973 to July 1, 1975. *House Bill 18-1244* creates a submarine service license plate, available to honorably discharged, retired, reserve, or active members of the submarine service of the U.S. Navy who submit required forms and pay a one-time special plate fee of \$50.

House Bill 18-1016, which was postponed indefinitely, would have created a Seabees license plate. Seabees are members of the U.S. Naval Construction Battalions.