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PRESS RELEASE

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Senate Approves “The BRAVE Act” for Veterans

Improving Benefits and Services for Veterans, Active Military Members and Families

BOSTON –The Massachusetts Senate on Thursday unanimously passed “The Brave Act” – new legislation that will expand benefits and increase access to a range of services for veterans, active-duty military and their families, **Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer)** announced.

Understanding the sacrifice that military personnel and their families make not only while on active duty, but also after returning home, the Massachusetts Legislature has consistently provided a continuum of major veteran legislation to help with those who sacrifice the most for our freedoms.

Included in the bill is an amendment, filed by Senator Gobi, which would create the Massachusetts Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Program Fund. The fund would be administered by the Department of Agricultural Resources to integrate veterans into the field of agriculture and support veterans currently working in agriculture. The program will address training, employment, income, productivity, and retention of veterans in agricultural work.

"As the daughter of a Veteran and Vice Chair of the committee I fully support initiatives that assist Veterans and their families," said Senator Gobi. "I appreciate the support of my colleagues in adopting my amendment to establish a Veteran and Warriors to Agriculture program, to help transition from the battlefield to agricultural fields."

On the recognition front, the legislation designates the 5th day of April as Gold Star Wives Day and the last Sunday in September as Gold Star Mothers and Families Day and directs cities and towns to designate reserved parking for veterans at all city and town halls.

The bill also grants paid military leave for those called to duty by the armed forces for up to 40 days for training and operation purposes.

To help ease the costs of housing, the legislation changes the requirement for veterans to receive property tax exemptions from residing in the Commonwealth for five years down to two years. It also increases the amount a veteran can earn on their property tax exemption for volunteering in their city or town.

The BRAVE Act increases the burial expense paid by commonwealth from \$2,000 to \$4,000 for indigent veterans to receive to adequately provide for a dignified funeral. It also exempts any veterans who receive annuities for service to their country from income calculations when applying for state programs or services.

The bill also addresses the following by:

- Addressing emergency medical transportation reimbursements;
- Revising Veteran Court Diversion programs;
- Updating the veteran bonus program at the State Treasurer's Office, and;
- Provides several studies and analysis regarding higher education, incarcerated veterans, and National Guard recognition.

The BRAVE Act, which now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration, is the legislature's latest effort to support veterans, military members and their families.

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