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PRESS RELEASE

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Senate Passes Veterans Bill to Support Veterans, Service Members and their Families

BOSTON – Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer) has announced that today the Massachusetts State Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 2325 “*An Act Relative to Housing, Operations, Military Service, and Enrichment*”, The Massachusetts HOME Act. This legislation expands on the commitment the Massachusetts Senate has to our veterans, service members and their families by providing benefits and services.

The passage of the Valor Act I 2012 and Valor Act II in 2014 helped Massachusetts become the number one state in the nation for providing for our veterans.

“As the Senate Vice Chair of the Veterans and Federal Affairs Committee I was proud to stand with my colleagues in passing another piece of important legislation to aid Veterans and their families,” said **Senator Gobi**. “In addition, I was also pleased to have the unanimous support of my colleagues on an amendment I filed to the bill. The amendment will allow our cities and towns to deficit spend for Veterans benefits, as they are allowed to do for unanticipated snow and ice costs.

“Providing the support benefits for active duty service members and their families as well as addressing the needs for our veterans honors their sacrifice to our nation,” said **Senate President Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst)**. “The Soldiers Homes in both Holyoke and Chelsea provide both critical care and a community that is essential for the well-being of our veterans. This bill provides the reassurances veterans deserve that their boards of trustees shall remain independent, and that day-to-day operations will remain under the control of superintendents who work directly with them.”

“I am so proud of the commitment from my colleagues and the leadership of the Senate in continuing to address the needs of our veterans,” said **Senator Mike Rush (D-Boston) Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs**. “This legislation not only provides comprehensive services and programs to those who serve their country, but give them the recognition that they deserve. It is our job

as elected officials to do all we can to support those brave men and women and their families who serve this great country.”

“This bill earned bi-partisan support because it provides important benefits to veterans and their families in terms of employment, housing, property tax relief, education, and other services,” said **Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr** (R-Gloucester). “Massachusetts leads the nation in our assistance programs offered to veterans, and rightly so because they deserve a support system which reflects their vital service to America and sacrifice on our behalf.”

Focusing on housing and long-term support, the passage of the Veterans HOME Act continues the strong reputation that Massachusetts has as a leader in understanding the sacrifice that military personnel and their families make not only while on active duty, but also after returning home.

To increase access to housing for veterans, the bill grants veterans preference in admission for scattered site housing units where no low-income family housing was developed. The bill also requires housing authorities to exclude amounts of disability compensation paid by the federal government for the purpose of computing rent of a disabled veteran. In addition, the bill gives eligible veterans a preference in housing for the elderly and person with liabilities in all communities, not only the community in which the veteran resides.

To honor the service of veterans and their families, the bill provides a property tax exemption for the surviving spouse of any soldier, sailor, and member of the National Guard or veteran who, during active duty service, suffered an injury or illness which was the proximate cause of death. The bill also gives veterans who have a 100% disability rating for service connected blindness a property tax exemption.

Other provisions of this Act include:

- The expansion of the Public Service Scholarship to children of any military or service person missing in action and children of prisoners of war;
- Allows employees of the Commonwealth who are members of the armed forces reserves and are ordered to service for more than 30 consecutive to be paid the regular base salary reduced by the amount received as base pay for military service. It also preserves the seniority or accrued leave time;
- Allows cities and towns to appoint a veterans agent for 3 year terms instead of the current 1 year term;
- Establishes the Office of Veterans Homes and Housing within the Department of Veterans Services to oversee the Soldiers Home in Chelsea and in Holyoke;
- Creates a post-deployment commission to study ways to improve services to veterans who have been deployed overseas;
- Adds veteran status as a protected class under the statute prohibiting discrimination in employment.

The bill will now be reconciled with the version passed by the House of Representatives before being sent to the Governor for his signature.

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