

# **HOLLISTON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES**

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CH 115 OF THE Massachusetts General laws dates back to 1861 and the Civil War and to related laws and regulations, which established a Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services, to oversee state mandated municipal Department of Veterans Services of the distribution of benefits to Massachusetts Veterans.

LOCAL DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES ARE MANDATED BY STATE LAW TO BE MAINTAINED IN ALL 351 CITIES AND TOWNS FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF ASSISTING VETERANS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS IN RECEIVING FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL BENEFITS MADE AVAILABLE BY THE U S GOVERNMENT, BY THE COMMONWEALTH AND ITS TAX PAYERS.

IT IS THE JOB OF YOUR VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER TO BE A PART OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE AND THE REPRESENTATIVE OF BOTH PAST AND PRESENT LOCAL VETERANS POPULATION AND TO PROVIDE THE VETERAN AND THEIR DEPENDENTS (LIVING AND DEAD) ACCESS TO EVERY FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL BENEFITS AND SERVICES TO WHICH THEY ARE ENTITLED- INCLUDING ASSISTING IN THE FUNERAL AND HONORING THEM AFTER DEATH.

WE ESTIMATE THAT 25% OF THE RESIDENTS OF OUR TOWN ARE VETERANS.

IN THE PAST, WE WERE DESIGNATED AS VETERANS AGENTS AND DIRECTORS OF VETERANS SERVICES; THIS WAS CHANGED IN 2001 TO OUR PRESENT DESIGNATION AS VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS.

STATISTICALLY, IN THE YEARS 1945-1995, BEFORE THE MAJORITY OF VETERANS POPULATION BECAME SENIOR CITIZENS, FEWER VETERANS, EXCEPT FOR THE SMALLER NUMBER WHO HAD SEVERE DISABILITIES OR WHO WAS IN ECONOMIC DISTRESS AND IN NEED OF PUBLIC ASISTANCE, SOUGHT OUT THE SERVICE OF THE LOCAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER.

BUT, WITH THE PASSAGE OF YEARS, TIMES HAVE CHANGED AND HELP FOR OUR VETERANS IS NEEDED TODAY MORE THAN EVER BEFORE.

DURING THE 3<sup>rd</sup> QUARTER OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY, MUCH OF THE VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS CASELOADS CONCERNED ELDERLY WW1 AND SPANISH AMERICAN WAR VETERANS. DURING THE LAST QUARTER OF THE CENTURY, ATTENTION TURNED MORE TO THE VIETNAM VETERAN, WHO, IN GREATER NUMBERS THAN WW11 AND KOREAN WAR VETERANS, TURNED TO THEIR VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS FOR HELP, BECAUSE OF PROBLEMS WITH PTSD, AGENT ORANGE, HOMELESSNESS AND ADDICTION, BECAUSE THE BULK OF WORLD WAR 11 AND KOREAN WAR VETERANS HAD SETTLED DOWN TO JOB, EDUCATION, HOMES AND RAISING FAMILIES. DURING THE LAST HALF OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY THEY HAD LITTLE NEED OF THE SERVICES OF THEIR VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS, THUS UNTIL 1995, THE TIME AND ENERGIES OF MOST VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS WERE SPENT HELPING A RELATIVE HANDFUL OF VETERANS OR CONDUCTING AND PARTICIPATING IN CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES, HONORING LOCAL VETERANS.

AS WE ENTER THE 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY, THE WORLD WAR 11 AND KOREAN WAR VETERANS WHO DID NOT NEED THE SERVICES OF THE VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS IN THE PAST, ARE NOW IN THE LAST 3<sup>rd</sup> OF THEIR LIVES, MOST WELL INTO THEIR 70s AND 80s, AND FOR THE FIRST TIME IN NEED OF HELP FROM THEIR LOCAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS.

ALMOST EVERY ONE OF THESE VETERANS HAS MEDICAL PROBLEMS OR A NEED FOR PRESCRIPTION MEDICATION. THEY ARE NOW BECOMING CONSCIOUS OF SERVICE-CONNECTED DISABILITIES, ONCE IGNORED—AND THEY ARE SEARCHING FOR MISSING AWARDS AND MEDALS—THEY ARE NOW ELIGIBLE FOR MEDICAL CARE, PRESCRIPTIONS, REAL ESTATE ABATEMENT, VETERANS LICENSE PLATES, AND BURIAL WITH FULL MILITARY HONORS IN A STATE OR FEDERAL VETERANS CEMETERY.

FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THEIR LIVES, THEY CAN BENEFIT FROM THE SERVICES OF A VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER, ESPECIALLY IF THEY KNOW THAT THERE IS A VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER AVAILABLE AND WHAT ASSISTANCE HE OFFERS EVERY VETERAN--REGARDLESS OF ECONOMIC STATUS, BUT ONLY BECAUSE OF THEIR VETERAN STATUS.

THUS, WHILE IT IS TRUE, THAT OUR VETERANS RANKS ARE DECLINING, THE DEMAND FOR HELP FROM LOCAL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS IS ON THE INCLINE. ALSO, AS LONG AS THE UNITED STATES MAINTAINS ITS ARMED FORCES, THERE WILL ALWAYS BE NEW VETERANS THAT RETURN TO MASSACHUSETTS TO SWELL THE RANKS AFTER THEIR TOURS OF DUTY ARE ENDED.

RECENT LEGISLATION HAS BEEN ENACTED BY THE COMMONWEALTH TO BENEFIT OUR VETERANS AND THEIR DEPENDENTS:

1. **WE NOW HAVE TWO STATE CEMETERIES**
2. **MANDATED TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION FOR ALL VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS**
3. **AN INCREASE IN BURIAL ALLOWANCE TO \$2,000.00**
4. **INCREASE IN REAL ESTATE TAX ABATEMENT FOR CERTAIN DISABLED VETERANS**
5. **GRANTING SURVIVING SPOUSE OF CERTAIN DISABLED VETERANS THE SAME REAL ESTATE TAX ABATEMENT THAT THE VETERAN RECEIVED WHILE ALIVE.**
6. **INCREASED AMOUNT OF ANNUITY TO \$2,000.00 INCLUDING ALL 100% DISABLED VETERANS.**
7. **PEACETIME VETERANS NOW ENTITLED TO ch 115 BENEFITS.**
8. **ESTABLISHED AND FUNDED A WOMANS VETERANS OUTREACH PROGRAM**
9. **WELCOME HOME BONUS-c 130 Acts of 2005---\$1,000.00---\$500.00**
10. **COMPILATION OF ALL VETERANS OF ALL WARS**
11. **ESTABLISH VETERANS WEB SITE**

FINALLY, FINANCIAL BENEFITS PAID TO ELIGIBLE VETERANS UNDER CHAPTER 115 ARE REIMBURSABLE TO THE TOWN AT **75%**.