

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Supporting Veterans and Members of the Armed Forces

01/18/2022

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed several pieces of legislation (A-259, A-1121, A-5694, and A-6012) which support and protect New Jersey's veteran and armed forces communities. These bills will expand civil service preference for veterans, upgrade penalties for misrepresentation of members of the armed forces, ease public school access for dependents of armed forces members, and provide funding to support the commissioning of the new USS New Jersey.

"Our veterans and members of the armed forces have selflessly dedicated their careers and their lives to serving our country and our state," **said Governor Murphy**. "The legislation I am signing today will benefit these brave New Jerseyans and their families. Today, and every day, we are grateful for the sacrifices made by New Jersey's veterans and reserve and active-duty soldiers, and we will continue to support them in every way we can."

"These bills expand support for families planning military moves to New Jersey, as well as veterans aspiring to the civil service," **said Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Commissioner Brig. Gen. Lisa Hou, D.O.** "A1121 toughens the stance against veteran status fraud, which is disrespectful to the more than 325,000 proud veterans of our great state. Finally, I hope all residents will share in excitement for the commissioning of the USS New Jersey this year."

Primary sponsors of A-259 include Assemblymembers Wayne DeAngelo, Raj Mukherji, and Daniel Benson, and Senators Vin Gopal, and Joseph Pennacchio.

"Generally, we pay tribute to our veterans on Veterans Day, or some other patriotic holiday. Yet we should be paying tribute to our veterans as well as to our active duty military members all the time, in thanks for their service, sacrifice and commitment to keeping our country strong and safe," **said Senator Vin Gopal**. "With the signing of these bills, we continue to recognize the service of members of the military and support them and their families, by focusing on education, and allowing them to pursue their dreams under what can sometimes be difficult school transitions and relocations. We should continue to honor their sacrifice for the institutions this nation holds dear."

"This bill signing will help veterans find employment more quickly after leaving the armed forces. Stable employment in a steady job is one of the best ways veterans can assimilate into life outside of the military," **said Senator Joe Pennacchio**. "It is a well-deserved benefit for the courageous men and women making the transition from military to civilian life."

"Veterans who participated in a military campaign for which a medal has been designated or supported combat operations without direct presence in the actual theater of war should not be denied civil service preference for their faithful service to our country," **said Assemblymembers Wayne DeAngelo, Raj Mukherji, and Dan Benson, in a joint statement**. "This legislation will address an unnecessary distinction to assist certain service members in their quest for civilian employment."

This legislation provides civil service preference to military service members who did not serve in a theater of operation, but did serve during a war or conflict for which the federal government authorized a campaign or expedition medal.

Primary sponsors of A-1121 include Assemblymembers Carol Murphy, Ronald Dancer, and Sterley Stanley, and Senators Joseph Lagana, and Joseph Pennacchio.

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"Current and former members of our military have protected and served our country to earn their much-deserved benefits," **said Assemblymembers Carol Murphy and Sterley Stanley in a joint statement**. "Those who unjustly misrepresent themselves as US veterans, through 'stolen valor' to take advantage of our system deserve a harsh penalty. This measure will ensure that those who break the law and impersonate a war hero receive the proper and upgraded punishment."

"No one should get a mere slap on the wrist for putting on the uniform to defraud someone," **said Assemblyman Ron Dancer**. "As a veteran myself, I find it abhorrent that anyone would deceive others for gain by impersonating our proud men and women who sacrificially serve our country. It's my goal that these tougher penalties will deter would-be frauds."

"Impersonating a member of our volunteer military or a veteran who has faithfully served this country and helped to protect the freedoms and institutions we hold dear is a shameful act, and one that should bring the highest possible penalty within reason," **said Senator Joseph Lagana**. "With this law we hope to curtail this cynical activity, and make the punishment for this deceit better fit the crime."

"It is inspiring to see veterans who honorably served our nation return home and continue serving their community. Unfortunately, there are scammers who portray veterans to claim benefits reserved for those who truly served," **said Senator Joe Pennacchio**. "This new law increases punishment and helps discourage this despicable behavior."

This legislation upgrades certain crimes of misrepresenting oneself as a member or veteran of the United States Armed Forces or organized militia. Under current law, it is a crime of the third degree, subject to a minimum fine of \$1,000, for any person to knowingly, with the intent to impersonate or deceive for the purpose of obtaining money, property, or other tangible benefit, to misrepresent oneself as a member or veteran of the United States Armed Forces or organized militia or a recipient of any decoration or medal created by Federal and State laws and regulations to honor the members or veterans of the United States Armed Forces or the organized militia. Under this legislation, these crimes have now been upgraded to a second degree if the actor obtains money, property or other tangible benefit in the amount of \$75,000 or more. If the actor obtains money, property or other tangible benefit less than \$75,000, then the crime would remain as a crime of the third degree, subject to a minimum fine of \$1,000.

Primary sponsors of A-5694 include Assemblyman Ronald Dancer, and Senators Vin Gopal, and Fred Madden. Former Assemblymembers Eric Houghtaling and Joann Downey were primary sponsors of this legislation in the prior legislative session.

"It's a stressful time for families when they receive relocation orders," **said Assemblyman Ron Dancer.** "Military families already face so many challenges, and the children of those moms and dads in our armed forces face additional difficulties moving to a new school district where everything is unfamiliar. Allowing these students to walk into that new school knowing who their teachers are, and what classes they will be attending, can offer peace of mind to them and their parents."

"Our military families undergo a great deal of stress when they receive relocation orders, and strict school registration requirements only add to their burden," **said Assembly sponsors Eric Houghtaling and Joann Downey.** "Not allowing service members to enroll their children in their anticipated school district until they physically move puts those children at risk of missing important deadlines, which can have serious repercussions such as summer school or delayed graduation.

This legislation permits the dependents of a military member to enroll in a public school district in advance of the military member's relocation to the district. Under current law, such dependents cannot enroll in the district until proof of residence can be provided. This legislation allows enrollment upon the presentation of a copy of the military member's relocation orders even if the family has not yet physically relocated to the school district. Once enrolled, the child shall be permitted to attend classes and receive services free of charge in the same manner as if they were already a resident of the school district.

Primary sponsors of A-6012 include Assemblymembers William Moen, Carol Murphy, and Roy Freiman, and Senators Paul Sarlo, and Vin Gopal.

"This appropriation to support the commissioning of the USS New Jersey and the officers and crew assigned to the boat is the right thing to do," **said Assemblymembers Bill Moen, Carol Murphy, and Roy Freiman, in a joint statement.** "A ship's commissioning is an historic event that brings together our military, veterans, and local community with significant economic benefits for the surrounding region. We're proud that the Battleship New Jersey is now a museum and memorial moored on the Camden City Waterfront. We will continue to do everything possible to honor our veterans and their families"

This legislation appropriates up to \$500,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs for the USS New Jersey Commissioning Committee. The purpose of the appropriation is to support the commissioning of the USS New Jersey and the officers and crew assigned to the ship. Contributions to the USS New Jersey Commissioning Committee support traditional Commissioning Week activities, visits to the state by crewmembers, and habitability upgrades to the boat for the crew. Expenditure of the amount appropriated is subject to approval by the Adjutant General of an itemized plan for the expenditure to be submitted by the USS New Jersey Commissioning Committee. Any amount unexpended shall be donated for the support of personnel and their families and for the funding of existing or the creation of new United States Navy scholarship programs.

"First, I would like to take a moment to applaud the Governor and state legislatures for acknowledging the sacrifices made by veterans and those who are currently serving," **said Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of New Jersey Commander Luddie H. Austin.** "As veteran and resident of our great state I am thankful for the Governor in recognizing our heroes in the workforce and society, as he seeks to enhance the benefits and entitlements of veterans. I look forward to our healthy relationship as we continue to advocate on behalf of all veterans."

"The Veterans of Foreign Wars is grateful for the passage and signing of this legislation which will greatly enhance employment opportunities for veterans and ensure the children of our military service members receive an uninterrupted education," **said Veterans of Foreign Wars State Adjutant and Quartermaster Ken Hagemann.** "The VFW has advocated for decades that a vet is a vet regardless of era or conflict. We are pleased that these arbitrary barriers are finally coming down for state benefits and that all veterans are now becoming equally entitled to those benefits. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature to make New Jersey a place where veterans will want to live and thrive."

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