

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 27, 2011

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This year's state legislation favorable toward veterans

RICHMOND—The 2011 General Assembly passed, and Governor McDonnell has signed into law, a number of bills and budget amendments favorable toward veterans as well as active duty military members. Legislation focused on education, vital records, judicial procedures for veterans and military members, and a tax exemption for veterans with a 100% permanent and total service-connected disability. Budget amendments provided additional resources for the Virginia Department of Veterans Services benefits services, cemeteries, and care centers, and resources for the Virginia War Memorial.

The new legislation waives the one-year residency requirement for veterans to qualify for in-state tuition rates, provided other steps are taken to establish domicile intent. And, the Commonwealth's Bureau of Vital Records will provide records free of charge to veterans filing for veterans disability benefits.

The General Assembly passed enabling legislation allowing (but not requiring) counties and cities to establish special judicial procedures for veterans and military service members. The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program will work with cities and counties who request assistance with implementing these procedures.

Legislators passed enabling legislation implementing the constitutional amendment requiring localities to grant a real estate tax exemption for veterans with a 100%, permanent and total, service-connected disability. Voters overwhelmingly approved the amendment this past fall and the legislation took effect January 1, 2011.

Budget amendments approved by the Governor and General Assembly included \$402,403 to fill seven vacant benefit services positions in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS), and \$82,306 to establish a county veterans service officer liaison program. Other amendments included \$387,164 to support cemetery operations.

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services received authorization to apply for federal grant funds to construct a care center in Southwest Virginia and for renovations to the Virginia Veterans Care Center in Roanoke. The agency received \$3.3 million to fund the state's portion for building a 40-bed addition to the Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center in Richmond.

The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program received a \$250,000 increase. This program waives tuition and required fees at state colleges and universities for the spouses and children of military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who became at least 90 percent disabled as a result of military service in an armed conflict. An annual stipend of up to \$1,500 per student is also provided to offset costs such as room, board, books, and supplies.

Finally, the Virginia War Memorial received \$100,000 in funding for additional security costs. The Memorial is one of the premier veterans memorials in the United States.

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