

During the 2007 legislative session, the General Assembly considered numerous issues regarding those currently serving in the military and their families, as well as Colorado veterans.

Education

House Bill 07-1163 makes a member of the armed forces, or a member's dependent, eligible for in-state tuition status at higher education institutions if the member is transferred to Colorado on a temporary assignment of duty. However, the bill does not make the member who is transferred on a temporary assignment, or the member's dependent, eligible for a tuition stipend from the College Opportunity Fund. The bill also grants in-state tuition status to members of the Colorado National Guard who maintain their sole residence in Colorado, and their dependents. Previously, the law granted in-state tuition status to members of the armed forces who were on a permanent change of station basis in Colorado, and their dependents. Under House Bill 07-1163, a dependent remains eligible for in-state tuition when the member transfers to another state if the dependent remains enrolled in a higher education institution.

Beginning in FY 2007-08, **House Bill 07-1232** provides a mechanism by which the Colorado Department of Education may provide supplemental funding to school districts that have a large increase in pupil counts due to military deployments. To be eligible for the supplemental funding, the district must have a military dependent pupil enrollment of 25 or more students or 1 percent of total district enrollment, and must submit an estimate of military dependent supplemental enrollment by January 15 and an actual count by February 16. Eligible students are those who are the dependents of full-time active duty military or military reserves who have been called to active duty. In addition, eligible students must have joined the district after the October 1 pupil count and before February 1 of the same school year and must not have been included in another district's October 1 count.

Senate Bill 07-072, which was postponed indefinitely, would have allowed higher education institutions to request reimbursement from the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) for refunds made to students who were called to active duty and deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan during the academic year. Under the bill, CCHE would have been required to verify the information and, upon request, reimburse the institution for refunds made to active duty personnel.

Life Insurance

House Bill 07-1364 requires the Commissioner of Insurance to promulgate life insurance rules to define "dishonest, unfair, and deceptive military marketing and sales practices," based on federal law.

Senate Bill 07-030, which was postponed indefinitely, would have required the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to reimburse a member of the Colorado National Guard for premiums paid for benefits under the federal Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Program while the member serves in a combat zone. Premium reimbursement would have been for each month the member is deployed in a combat zone on and after July 1, 2007, and would have been limited to premiums paid for up to \$400,000 of policy coverage, up from the federal government's current reimbursement rate of \$150,000.

Mental Health Services

Senate Bill 07-146 creates a three-year mental health services pilot program in the Colorado Springs area for families of recently discharged veterans of Iraq or Afghanistan. Under the program, the Department of Human Services is required to purchase mental health education, referral, and treatment services from community mental health centers for participating families. A copayment of up to \$20 per month is required

for participants, and participants must use available insurance coverage before accessing pilot program dollars. Participating community mental health centers are required to collect data on the pilot program and report to the department on the program's effectiveness. The bill creates a fund for the program's operation, and transfers tobacco settlement money into the new fund. The bill also allows the department to receive gifts, grants, and donations for the pilot program.

Military Family Relief Fund Eligibility

House Bill 07-1371 eliminates the maximum pay grade that a Colorado National Guard member, a reservist, or an active duty military member stationed in Colorado, may hold in order to be eligible, or for his or her family to be eligible, to receive a grant from the Military Family Relief Fund. The Colorado National Guard Foundation makes grants from the fund to Colorado National Guard members and reservists, to active duty military members stationed in Colorado, and to their families for the purpose of defraying the cost of food, housing, medical care, utilities, and other expenses when a family member leaves civilian employment for active military duty or is on active military duty in a hostile fire zone. The bill requires the foundation, to the extent possible, to make grants to eligible applicants who hold the lowest pay grades. The fund generates revenue from donations received from the voluntary income tax checkoff on the Colorado state individual income tax return.

State and Veterans Nursing Homes

House Bill 07-1211 creates a seven-member Board of Commissioners of State and Veterans Nursing Homes to advise the Division of State and Veterans Nursing Homes, within the Department of Human Services, as well as the state nursing home in Trinidad, and veterans nursing homes in Homelake, Florence, Rifle, Aurora, and Walsenburg. Under the bill, board members are appointed by the Governor with the consent of the Senate, and no more than four members of the board can be members of the same political party. The bill requires the board to:

- provide continuity, predictability, and stability in the operation of state and veterans nursing homes;
- provide guidance to future administrators at the homes;
- ensure that state and veterans nursing homes are providing the highest quality care, and ensure that the financial status of the homes is sound;
- obtain information regarding the status of the central fund for state nursing homes, and issues of resident care;
- participate in selecting consulting firms for state and veterans nursing homes; and
- make an annual report of issues and recommendations for the executive director of the Department of Human Services, the Governor, the members of the House and Senate Health and Human Services committees, the members of the House and Senate State, Veterans, and Military Affairs Committees, and the State Board of Veterans Affairs.

House Bill 07-1212 requires the State Board of Human Services to create, by rule, local advisory boards for each state or veterans nursing home located in Homelake, Florence, Trinidad, Rifle, Aurora, and Walsenburg. The bill requires the local advisory boards to consist of at least five members, and requires one of these members to be a resident of the associated facility, or a family member of a resident.

Other Military Issues

Special License Plates

Special license plates are state-issued license plates with a specific purpose to either acknowledge or benefit a particular group or entity. The General Assembly approved four bills in 2007 creating new license plates or changing requirements for acquiring existing license plates that honor current or former members of the armed forces or their family members. All of the plates are subject to a one-time special license plate fee of \$25, and an additional one-time issuance fee of \$25 established by **Senate Bill 07-241**, except for the "Fallen Service Member" special license plate, for which one set of plates is exempted from the fees. The following special license plates are created or affected by the bills:

- the "Fallen Service Member" plate (House Bill 07-1352);
- the "U.S. Army Special Forces" plate (House Bill 07-1352);
- the "Disabled Veteran" plate (House Bill 07-1352);
- the "Korean War Veteran" plate (House Bill 07-1105);
- the "United States Air Force" plate (House Bill 07-1200); and
- the "United States Coast Guard" plate (Senate Bill 07-027).

House Bill 07-1352 expands the list of family members who are eligible to apply for a "Fallen Service Member" special license plate to include siblings and grandparents of fallen U.S. military personnel. In addition, the bill creates a new "U.S. Army Special Forces" special license plate, and repeals a requirement that the owner of a "Disabled Veteran" special license plate send a disabled application to the Department of Revenue when transferring the plate to another vehicle. **House Bill 07-1105** extends the dates of service in the Korean War by approximately 17 months with regard to eligibility for the "Korean War Veteran" special license plate, so that veterans who served in Korea between June 27, 1950, and January 31, 1955, are now eligible to receive the plate. Previously, Korean War veterans were eligible to receive the plate if they served between June 25, 1950, and July 27, 1953. Beginning in January, 2008, **House Bill 07-1200** allows individuals who have received an honorable discharge from, are retired from, or are active or reserve members of the U.S. Air Force to purchase the "United States Air Force" special license plate. The license plate will indicate that an owner of a motor vehicle is a veteran, reserve member, or active member of the United States Air Force. **Senate Bill 07-027** allows individuals who have been honorably discharged from the U.S. Coast Guard, or who are currently active, auxiliary, or reserve members of the U.S. Coast Guard to purchase the "United States Coast Guard" special license plate.

Memorials

Senate Bill 07-086 creates a five-member commission in the Department of Personnel and Administration to erect memorials near the Colorado Veterans Monument in Denver's Lincoln Park honoring military personnel killed in certain conflicts. Under the bill, the commission makes design and siting recommendations to the Preservation Trust Committee, which then submits a proposal for design and siting to the Capitol Building Advisory Committee. The bill requires the first memorial constructed by the commission to honor personnel killed since September 11, 2001, during the war on terrorism, including those killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Governor, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the Minority Leaders of the Senate and House each appoint one member to the commission. The bill allows the commission to solicit and accept donations for the memorials, and creates a fund for the monies received for the memorials. The bill also places a voluntary contribution designation line on the Colorado individual income tax form for three years, but only if there are no more than 14 other contribution lines authorized for the 2007 form by September 1, 2007.

House Joint Resolution 07-1028 encourages the Board of the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Trust Fund to provide funding to outdoor veterans memorials and monuments throughout the state.

Receipt of Forfeited Property by National Guard

House Bill 07-1275 authorizes the Colorado National Guard to accept, dispose of, and expend property and proceeds forfeited to the federal government and allocated to the guard that is associated with the guard's participation in drug interdiction and enforcement. The bill also creates a fund into which any money allocated to the Colorado National Guard as a result of its drug interdiction and enforcement efforts is deposited for the guard's use.

Motorcycle Operators Safety Training Program

Senate Bill 07-042 allows members of the armed forces permanently stationed in Colorado to take a Motorcycle Operators Safety Training (M.O.S.T.) program course for the same cost as a Colorado resident. These members must have a valid driver's license from another state. The M.O.S.T. program is managed by the Department of Transportation to develop the knowledge, attitudes, habits, and skills needed for safe motorcycle operation. Previously, only Colorado residents with a valid Colorado driver's license, minor driver's license, or instruction permit could enroll in a M.O.S.T. course.

Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion Smoking Ban Exemption

Senate Bill 07-120, which was postponed indefinitely, would have exempted from the "Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act" any regular meeting place of a local chapter of a veterans organization incorporated pursuant to federal law. The exemption would not have applied when the meeting place is open to the general public.