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An Act To Help Veterans Access Jobs, Education, Health Care and Housing and Provide General Support to Veterans

CONCEPT DRAFT SUMMARY

This bill is a concept draft pursuant to Joint Rule 208.

This bill proposes to establish a bill of rights to help veterans access jobs, education, health care and housing and provide general support to veterans.

1. The bill would help veterans access jobs by:

A. Requiring the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation to waive licensing fees for veterans;

B. Requiring licensing boards affiliated with the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation to waive licensing fees for veterans;

C. Expanding eligibility of veterans and their spouses for the program that helps veterans and their spouses obtain occupational licenses;

D. Requiring each board, commission, office and agency within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation or affiliated with the department to permit a veteran or spouse who holds a comparable license in another state to acquire a license by endorsement in this State for the remainder of the term of the license from the other state or until a license is obtained in this State or obtain a temporary license in this State for the period of time necessary to obtain a license in this State;

E. Requiring each board, commission, office and agency within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation or affiliated with the department to grant a full or partial exemption from continuing education requirements for a veteran or spouse;

F. Obtaining information regarding the implementation of the process established to help qualified veterans and their spouses to obtain occupational licenses, including data concerning how many veterans and their spouses have received assistance;

G. Extending renewal dates for occupational licenses for veterans and their spouses;

H. Waiving fees for licensing veterans as emergency medical services persons and security guards;

I. Extending the period of time allowed between the completion of military service and the favorable treatment of that military service for purposes of occupational licensing; and

J. Allowing all veterans to purchase credit for time served in the military for purposes of the Maine Public Employees Retirement System.

2. The bill would help veterans access education by:

A. Extending the amount of time given to veterans to transition from military service to school;

B. Requiring each campus of the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System to have a dedicated space for veterans with at least one computer where veterans may meet and have the tools available to them that they need to access benefits;

C. Providing loans to veterans for books that are required for classes;

D. Providing services for veterans who receive other than an honorable discharge from military service;

E. Providing easier readmittance to school for veterans who leave school for health-related issues; and

F. Providing graduate school assistance to veterans.

3. The bill would help veterans access health care by:

A. Continuing and improving the pilot program established in Resolve 2017, chapter 24 that provides mental health case management services to veterans;

B. Providing mental health treatment in all counties for veterans;

C. Waiving the fee for medical marijuana identification cards for veterans;

D. Providing that the time limit for veterans who are otherwise eligible for assistance under the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is twice the time limit that would otherwise apply to the veterans; and

E. Supporting programs that provide transportation to medical appointments for veterans.

4. The bill would help veterans access housing by:

A. Providing funding to seek long-term solutions to reduce barriers, such as criminal convictions, substance use, mental illness and physical disabilities, to veterans securing housing;

B. Increasing the number of housing vouchers provided to homeless veterans;

C. Providing funding to assist landlords to improve substandard apartments and give incentives to landlords to rent to veterans;

D. Changing the "Salute ME" mortgage program administered by the Maine State Housing Authority to provide veterans with a greater discount on home mortgage rates;

E. Changing the property tax exemption for certain veterans to apply to all veterans;

F. Surveying public land, unused public buildings and available private buildings, including closed mills, for opportunities to provide housing or temporary shelter for veterans;

G. Providing preference to veterans in the Bridging Rental Assistance Program, which assists persons with mental illness to secure temporary housing; and

H. Providing funding for organizations and facilities that provide housing for homeless veterans.

5. The bill would provide general support to veterans by:

A. Raising the amount of pension income paid under an employee retirement plan that is exempt from the income tax;

- B. Extending the time for which a driver's license is valid for active duty military members; and
- C. Increasing the maximum amount of a grant of temporary assistance that may be provided to a veteran from the Veterans Temporary Assistance Fund from \$2,000 to \$2,500.