



*Senator Joe Rafferty*  
*3 State House Station*  
*Augusta, ME 04333-0003*  
*Office (207) 287-1515*  
*Joe.Rafferty@legislature.maine.gov*

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**Presenting LD 827: An Act To Help Veterans Access Jobs, Education and Housing**

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and distinguished members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee: I am Joe Rafferty, I proudly represent all of the people of Senate District 34 in the Maine Senate and I'm here to present LD 827, "An Act To Help Veterans Access Jobs, Education and Housing"

I'd like to start out by mentioning that this bill is split into three parts: Part A, Part B, and Part C. Part A focuses on licensing and certifications for veterans and their family members. From the time that this legislation was drafted to now, this aspect of the bill has been taken care of by Sen. Curry's LD 374, "An Act To Allow Veterans, Active Duty Service Members and Their Spouses To Apply for Temporary Occupational Licenses and Certifications." Therefore, I'd like to turn the focus of your attention to Parts B and C, as they are still critically important.

Part B of this bill helps veterans access postsecondary education in the State by designating liaisons intended to provide academic counseling and benefits assistance to students who are members of the United States Armed Forces within the University of Maine System, the Maine Community College System and the Maine Maritime Academy. Additionally, this bill designates that each school within these school systems provides a specific location where those students may congregate to study, to provide support to their peers and to receive assistance from the liaison.

Part C of this bill helps veterans access housing by requiring the Department of Health and Human Services, in coordination with the Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services within the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management, to develop a method of identifying veterans who are homeless and eligible for temporary housing assistance under the Bridging Rental Assistance Program.

I think we can all agree that providing these resources to Maine veterans and active duty service members is a small token of gratitude that we could provide for them, given all they have done and continue to do for us, our communities and our country. Investing in their education by providing shared work spaces for them and their peers will strengthen their education and our state's school systems overall. Lastly, I find it unacceptable that our service members can return home with no roof over their head. While I understand this is a complex issue, Part C of this bill provides a path for us to do more to help fix this problem.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I am happy to answer questions you may have.