

# Governor Baker Signs BRAVE Act to Strengthen Services and Supports for Commonwealth's Veterans

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- Office of Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito
- Executive Office of Health and Human Services
- Governor's Press Office
- Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services

**CHELSEA** — Governor Charlie Baker today joined Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders, Secretary of Veterans' Services Francisco Ureña, members of the Legislature and veterans of the United States Armed Services at the ceremonial signing of *An Act Relative to Veterans Benefits, Rights, Appreciation, Validation and Enforcement* (S. 2632) at the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea. Known as the “BRAVE Act”, the legislation provides additional support for members of the veterans’ community and their families, including tax credits and enhanced educational opportunities.

“The Commonwealth will forever be indebted to the brave men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our freedoms, and expanding services for veterans under the BRAVE Act is a small way to honor their sacrifice,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “The BRAVE Act builds on Massachusetts’ nation-leading support for service members and strengthens our commitment to the Commonwealth’s veterans and their loved ones.”

“The BRAVE Act provides important additional resources for our veterans, and we thank the Legislature for their work in passing this bipartisan legislation,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** “The sacrifices of veterans’ families will be further recognized by this bill, through establishing annual days dedicated to honoring the Commonwealth’s Gold Star Wives, Mothers and Families.”

“We are grateful to our veterans and their families for their commitment, courage, and selflessness. Massachusetts prides itself on providing unparalleled access to health care, and the BRAVE Act furthers our support of our veterans’ physical and behavioral health care needs,” **said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders.**

“The Brave Act reinforces our first in the nation status in providing services and benefits to our veteran population,” said **Secretary of Veteran Affairs Francisco Ureña**. “I am pleased to see the legislature’s bipartisan effort in support of my fellow veterans.”

“As the daughter of a veteran with health challenges, I understand deeply our nation’s sacred responsibility to ensure that those who protected us through dangerous times are themselves protected,” said **Senate President Karen E. Spilka**. “The BRAVE Act will go a long way to fulfilling our promise to active-duty soldiers, veterans, and to their families, as Massachusetts continues to lead the nation in caring for veterans.”

“Massachusetts has a proud history of leading the nation in military-benefit programs and service, and this new law continues that tradition by providing additional supports to our service members and their families,” said **House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo**. “We’re sending a message to our heroes and their families that the Commonwealth honors their bravery, service and sacrifice.”

“This omnibus veteran’s legislation assists veterans and their families with employment protections, tax exemptions, burial expenses, court programs, medical care, and also continues to recognize those who serve and who have served,” said **Senator Mike Rush**, (D-Norfolk & Suffolk District) and Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs. “We want to ensure that Massachusetts remains number one in the nation in providing for our veterans. This legislation goes a long way in accomplishing this goal and I want to thank my colleagues in the legislature and the Baker Administration for their continued commitment to our veterans, service members and their families.”

“Senator Rush and I are proud of the work we accomplished this session to improve the quality of life for our veterans and their families. The Brave Act deals with tax exemptions, paid military leave, burial expenses, rights, appreciation, validation and enforcement,” said **Representative John Lawn**, Chairman of the Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs. “The Brave Act also closes many loopholes in The Valor Act diversion program that was meant to help our Veterans who are dealing with PTSD and other issues from their service to our country.”

## **BRAVE Act Summary**

Highlights from the BRAVE Act include:

- Designates April 5<sup>th</sup> as Gold Star Wives Day and the last Sunday in September as Gold Star Mothers and Families Day.
- Establishes a Massachusetts Veterans and Warriors Agriculture Program to enhance education, training, employment, income, productivity and retention of veterans working in or aspiring to work in the field of agriculture.
- Allows parents or surviving guardians of veterans, who died in service to the country, to receive a real estate credit on property beginning Jan. 1, 2019.
- Increases veterans’ local property tax work-off program from \$1,000 to \$1,500.
- Allows Gold Star License Plates to be affixed to commercial vehicles.

- Provides time off for veterans for Veterans Day and Memorial Day, with or without pay, at the discretion of the employer.
- Requires the Department of Veterans' Services to maintain and publish a list of law firms and organizations that provide pro bono legal representation for veterans
- Establishes a special commission to study cost and feasibility of exempting all cost to veterans of attending public higher education in Massachusetts.
- Directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services in consultation with the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security, to partner with a Massachusetts college or university to conduct a study relative to veterans and military members suffering from mental health or substance abuse issues related to their military service and their needs in the criminal justice system.
- Extends the veterans' bonus program administered by the Treasurer to allow for the maximum amount of benefits under the program, subject to appropriation, to those veterans who served during Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

At today's event, the Baker-Polito Administration announced that it will be breaking ground on the new long-term care facility at the Chelsea Soldiers' Home later this year, after **including** state funding for a new long-term care facility at the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea as part of the Fiscal Year 2018 capital budget plan. In November 2017, Governor Baker **signed legislation** to fund the construction of the \$199 million **154-bed Community Living Center**, and in April 2018, the Baker-Polito Administration received funding authorization from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and plans to spend approximately \$70 million net of federal reimbursement on the project. The federal funding was awarded through the VA's State Home Construction Grant Program which provides reimbursement of up to 65% of construction costs.

The Community Living Center will provide private, "home-like" rooms for veterans in accordance with VA standards of design which promotes greater accessibility, mobility, and enhanced quality of life. Services will include physical and occupational therapy, recreational activities and greater access to the outdoors. The Quigley Memorial Long Term Care Center will be fully operational during the construction process.

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## **Media Contact**

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