



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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Testimony of Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel Director Office of Chief Public Defender

Joint Committee on Veterans' Affairs - Public Hearing February 23, 2021

Raised Bill 918 An Act Concerning the Definition of Veteran

The Office of Chief Public Defender *supports Raised Bill 918, An Act Concerning the Definition of Veteran*. The bill amends the definition of "veteran" under state law so that veterans with a less than honorable discharge status and a qualifying condition will be eligible for benefits they are currently denied access to. A less than honorable discharge status is given under circumstances where a veteran has committed a minor infraction of the rules or conduct which is not criminal. The bill will apply to those veterans who have left service with a less than honorable discharge because of issues pertaining to their physical or mental health, PTSD, or because of the discriminatory effect policies have upon them as a member of a protected group.

Amending the definition of veteran as provided makes eligible those veterans currently ineligible to apply for certain pretrial diversionary programs. As a first-time offender, certain veterans will be eligible to apply for certain pretrial diversionary programs. If their application is granted by the court, these veterans would benefit from these rehabilitative programs.

This office requests that this bill be voted out of Committee favorably as it is fair and more inclusive than current state law, thereby assisting veterans who have served.