

# Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-6441

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS' OFFICE  
**Title:** OF ADVOCACY AND ASSISTANCE.

**Vote Date:** 2/18/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

**PH Date:** 1/30/2025

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee, requested by Department of Veterans' Affairs

### REASONS FOR BILL:

With five regional offices and eight veterans' service officers split between them, the Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance helps connect veterans with their benefits. Lately the Department has had trouble providing these services; as such, this bill establishes six additional veterans' service officer positions and three administrative worker positions.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Department of Veterans' Affairs, Commissioner, Ron Welch:** Mr. Welch expressed his support of this bill and explained the function of the Office of Advocacy and Assistance. The office represents roughly 10,000 veterans and brings in over \$195 million annually to those veterans in the form of various benefits. After the PACT Act of 2022 expanded the eligibility of many veterans for benefits, the office has been swamped with new requests for services. Increasing the available staff to process these requests would help the office to meet the sharp increase in demand.

### NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

**K. Robert Lewis, Legislative Committee Chair, American Legion Department of CT:** As a department service officer with the American Legion, Mr. Lewis expressed his support for expanding the number of veterans' service officers in the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

**Allison Weir, Executive Director, CT Veterans' Legal Center:** Ms. Weir explained the importance of veterans' service officers in helping veterans navigate the overly complicated VA benefit application process. The current number of service officers in the state is not nearly enough to cover the over 130,000 veterans in the state, and, given the restrictions on who can help veterans access their benefits, this is not a need that the market can fill. Therefore, she strongly supports any provision that will provide more veterans' service officers to Connecticut's veterans.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

**Reported by: Sam Sims**

**Date: 2/21/2025**