

Veterans' and Military Affairs Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-279 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT EXEMPTING VETERANS FROM PAYMENT OF THE PASSPORT TO
Title: THE PARKS MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION FEE.

Vote Date: 3/10/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Environment

PH Date: 2/24/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Sen. Rob Sampson, 16th Dist.

Sen. Jason Perillo, 21st Dist.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to exempt veterans from payment of the Passport to the Parks fee associated with motor vehicle registration. In doing so, it looks to honor veterans' service and sacrifices by affording them access to Connecticut's state parks without the additional \$8 annual fee.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Katie Dykes, Commissioner, Department of Energy and Environmental Protection:](#) Ms. Dykes expressed her opposition to this bill due to the large fiscal impact that would accompany it. She stated that while she appreciates the service and sacrifices of Connecticut's veterans, exempting the veteran population from the payment of the Passport to the Parks fee would result in a revenue loss of over \$1.46 million per year. Given that Passport to the Parks is the primary funding mechanism for the operation of Connecticut's state parks, this revenue loss would result in service reductions and would negatively impact the park system.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Harland Christofferson:](#) Mr. Christofferson expressed his support for this bill both as a modest recognition of veterans' service and as away to encourage outdoor activities among veterans. He noted that while the bill would lead to revenue loss from the Passport to the Parks program, he asserted that the fee is so small that the revenue loss would be negligible.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Tanya Bourgoin, President, Friends of Machimoodus and Sunrise State Parks: Ms. Bourgoin expressed her respect for veterans and her opposition to this bill, noting that the bill would not remove any existing barriers to access Connecticut's state parks. She pointed out that exempting veterans from the Passport to the Parks fee would result in a revenue loss of over \$1.2 million, which would inevitably lead to underfunding and degradation of CT state parks.

Neil Johnson, Chair, Connecticut Outdoor Recreation Alliance: Mr. Johnson expressed his opposition to this bill, noting the success of the Passport to the Parks program in spreading out the cost of maintaining state parks across vehicle registration. He explained that there is already a backlog of maintenance requests and state parks are already underfunded and understaffed, and exempting veterans from the Passport to the Parks fee would not only significantly decrease the program's revenue, it would also set a precedent for other groups that want exemptions from the fee.

Reported by: Sam Sims

Date: 3/16/26