

MEMORANDUM

TO: Kent Carlson and Michael Wishnie, Co-Chairs, Task Force to Study the Use of
MOS Specialty Training as a Substitute for State Licensing Requirements
FROM: Law Student Interns, Veterans Legal Services Clinic, Yale Law School
DATE: November 2, 2013
RE: Licensing Requirements for Firefighters in Connecticut

I. Recommendations:

- Direct the Connecticut Fire Academy to issue the appropriate level certification to Connecticut veterans trained in fire response.
- Streamline EMT licensing requirements (*see* Memorandum: Licensing Requirements for Emergency Medical Technicians in Connecticut).
- Waive the fee required for Connecticut veterans to take the CPAT and encourage them to take the test as soon as or even before they separate from the military.

II. Relevance to the Task Force

The latest IAVA Report¹ identified firefighting as a potential area for license streamlining. According to the report, firefighters in Connecticut have a median annual income of \$58,400, with a projected 100 annual openings over the next decade, for a projected annual industry growth rate of 8% over 10 years.

There are both pros and cons to focusing on transitioning veterans to licensed Connecticut firefighters. On the one hand, the job is an essential service and is poised to grow steadily over the next decade. A career as a firefighter entails good compensation and benefits. Of all of the professions and vocations listed in the report, only police officers have a higher salary. Finally, anecdotal evidence indicates that it is a highly sought after career path for many returning veterans because of its service orientation, difficulty, camaraderie, and compensation. However, there are relatively few military veterans, in Connecticut or elsewhere, who receive specific fire control and firefighting skills.

Nonetheless, generous annual salary and benefits, the service orientation of the profession, and the steadily growing demand for the service makes this vocation worth examining further. As with policing, anecdotal evidence indicates that a considerable number of veterans would have a high level of interest in pursuing careers as firefighters. In addition, many veterans will already have several of the soft skills required for this occupation, such as intuiting unity of command and effort, working in adverse conditions, risk management, handling irregular schedules and hours, and selflessness.

III. Licensing Requirements

Firefighting is managed locally. There are no statewide legislative or administrative licensing requirements to become a firefighter and most of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns set their own entrance requirements.²

Although there are no statewide requirements imposed on fire departments, most seek candidates who: 1) are high school graduates 2) have valid driver's licenses 3) are generally physically fit, and 4) have taken courses at Connecticut Fire Academy.³ Interviews with leadership at one Connecticut Fire Department revealed that EMT/Paramedic certification was a highly sought after skill by many departments, and a prerequisite to being hired by some.⁴ EMT certifications cost \$800 and up and take about 7 weeks to complete.⁵

In addition, some fire departments require that candidates demonstrate a requisite level of physical fitness by taking and passing the Candidate Physical Aptitude Test (CPAT).⁶ The CPAT is administered through the Connecticut Fire Academy at the CPAT Center in Meriden, Connecticut. The CPAT is a pass/fail test of physical preparedness and agility with a fee of \$150.⁷ Although the test is not always a prerequisite for applying to a particular town's fire department, passing the test is looked upon favorably.⁸

The Connecticut Fire Academy offers various levels of certification and training, but none are required by the state in order to be hired by a department. Once applicants are hired by a fire department, they attain the certification level required by their department. Moreover, there are no statewide minimum requirements. Regardless of the department's requirements for hiring, each department is responsible for equipping its firefighters with the skills they need through both formal training, such as the Connecticut Fire Academy, and on-the-job training and mentorship.⁹ In order to attend the formal training offered by the Connecticut Fire Academy students must be 18 and have a high school diplomas or GED.¹⁰

IV. Analysis

While there are no statewide statutory or administrative requirements for being hired into a fire department, the Task Force should aim to help Connecticut veterans with military firefighting training receive the appropriate level of certification from the Connecticut Fire Academy. These former service members would be highly attractive candidates.

Candidates without fire fighting experience would benefit from taking courses in firefighting prior to applying for positions. The Task Force should examine the GI Bill rules on firefighting courses to determine which Connecticut courses can receive these funds. Streamlining EMT certification for medically trained service members would also help veterans meet the minimum hiring requirements at some fire departments. EMT streamlining will enable veterans to be stronger candidates even where the certification is not a pre-requisite to hiring.

Finally, many former service members leave the service with a high level of physical preparedness. Allowing them access to the CPAT with a reduced or waived fees, or simply alerting veterans to the test as they exit the military, would advantage both candidates and fire departments. A career in firefighting may appeal to a broad cross section of veterans, including those who enjoy high levels of physical fitness and have prior medical training. State assistance in taking the CPAT and streamlining EMT licensing procedures would benefit Connecticut military veterans, even who were not formally trained as military firefighters. Connecticut currently has a *Vets to Firefighter* effort that provides information about the hiring process to interested veterans. This program would be an excellent platform for further efforts to ease the transition from the military to a career in firefighting.

REFERENCES & NOTES

¹ The Veterans Legal Services Clinic (VLSC) at Yale Law School drafted a report on veterans' employment for IAVA in October 2013. The draft report, which is titled *Transitioning Troops: Aiding Gulf War II Veterans in the Passage from War to the Workplace*, contains statistics on military occupational specialties and the Connecticut labor market. Copies were distributed to the Task Force at the first meeting. Please contact the VLSC law student interns if you would like another copy or more information: matthew.blumenthal@clinics.yale.edu; emma.kaufman@clinics.yale.edu; ryan.podolsky@clinics.yale.edu.

² Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, <http://www.ct.gov/cfpc/cwp/view.asp?a=2529&Q=315532>, October 2013.

³ Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, <http://www.ct.gov/cfpc/cwp/view.asp?a=2529&Q=315532>, October 2013.

⁴ Deputy Chief Paul Sandela, New Haven Fire Department, Phone Interview on October 10, 2013.

⁵ See the Memo on EMTs that was submitted to the Task Force along with this memo.

⁶ Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, <http://www.ct.gov/cfpc/cwp/view.asp?a=826&Q=246722&cfpcPNavCtr=#30585>, October 2013.

⁷ Commission on Fire Prevention and Control, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, <http://www.ct.gov/cfpc/cwp/view.asp?a=826&Q=246722&cfpcPNavCtr=#30585>, October 2013.

⁸ Deputy Chief Paul Sandela, New Haven Fire Department, Phone Interview on October 10, 2013.

⁹ Local fire departments determine the level of certification that they require each member of their department to attain. The Commission on Fire Prevention and Control offers fire service certification on a voluntary basis. Connecticut Commission on Fire Prevention and Control Fire Service Certification, Frequently Asked Questions, September 2010 (Revised November 2012).

¹⁰ The Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Connecticut Fire Academy, Recruit Firefighter Program, Information Sheet.