



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
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To: All Veteran Service Officers (VSOs), Annuity, and Chapter 115 Benefits Recipients

From: Kara Solimini, Assistant Secretary, Executive Office of Veterans Services

Date: November 7, 2024

Subject: HERO Act Financial Benefits Information for Recipients and Veteran Service Officers

On August 8, 2024, Governor Healey signed into law *An Act Honoring, Empowering, and Recognizing our Servicemembers and Veterans* (HERO Act, Chapter 178 of the Acts of 2024). The HERO Act is the most comprehensive piece of veteran legislation in Massachusetts history, reforming programs and services offered by the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) and other agencies within state government. I am writing you to highlight some important changes impacting the local administration and payment of Chapter 115 veterans' benefits. Below is a summation of these specific provisions:

Chapter 115 Financial Benefits (M.G.L. Ch. 115)

- The HERO Act updated M.G.L. Ch. 115, section 5 to resolve a conflict with veterans who receive both state and federal financial assistance. This update will ensure that veterans whose other benefits are increased due to adjustments in Cost-of-Living Allowance (COLA) will not lose access to assistance under the Chapter 115 benefits program for each calendar year.
- The HERO Act updated the eligibility for dependents of veterans under M.G.L. Ch. 115, section 5. Under the prior law, dependents were required to be residents of Massachusetts for three years before they had access to assistance under the Chapter 115 benefits program. Although EOVS resolved this issue in practice, the law was changed to ensure that dependents of veterans who are in need of assistance have a one-day residency requirement rather than a three year wait before they can receive help.
- The HERO Act broadens the definition of a veteran. This change better aligns the state Chapter 115 program definition of a veteran with the federal Veterans Affairs definition. This change allows more Massachusetts veterans to be eligible for benefits provided by EOVS such as our annuity, Chapter 115 benefits, access to the Massachusetts Veterans Homes, and peer to peer supports.
- The HERO Act updated the medical assistance program administered under 108 C.M.R. Section 10. Prior to the implementation of the HERO Act, behavioral health services

were not available to veterans under this program. Now, behavioral health reimbursement is available to eligible veterans.

- The HERO Act also provides clear statutory authority for EOVS to provide certain medical and dental benefits.

Annuity

- The HERO Act provided a \$500 annual increase in the disabled veteran annuity from \$2,000 to \$2,500. This increase will be phased in over two years. Veterans will receive a payment of \$1,250 in February of 2025. Starting in August of 2025, veterans will receive **one** annuity check per year of \$2,500.

The full text of the HERO Act can be found here:

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2024/Chapter178>.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our legal department at eovslegal@mass.gov.

Thank you for all you have done and all you continue to do to support the mission and providing the highest quality services to veterans of the Commonwealth.

Respectfully,

Kara Solimini

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