

CHAPTER 30--S.F.No. 1959

An act relating to state government; establishing a budget for the Department of Military Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs; modifying various veterans services and benefits provisions; modifying certain state active service provisions; providing for the state armory building commission; providing benefits to veterans of the Secret War in Laos; establishing a task force; requiring the commissioner of administration to place a memorial plaque honoring Gold Star and Blue Star families on State Capitol grounds; requiring reports; appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 13.461, subdivision 27; 192.49, subdivisions 1, 2, by adding a subdivision; 193.143; 197.065; 197.236, subdivisions 8, 9; 197.608, subdivision 6; 197.75, subdivision 1; 197.791, subdivision 4; Laws 2023, chapter 38, article 1, section 3, subdivision 2, as amended; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 197.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

ARTICLE 1**MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS**Section 1. **APPROPRIATIONS.**

The sums shown in the columns marked "Appropriations" are appropriated to the agencies and for the purposes specified in this article. The appropriations are from the general fund, or another named fund, and are available for the fiscal years indicated for each purpose. The figures "2026" and "2027" used in this article mean that the appropriations listed under them are available for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, or June 30, 2027, respectively. "The first year" is fiscal year 2026. "The second year" is fiscal year 2027. "The biennium" is fiscal years 2026 and 2027.

APPROPRIATIONS**Available for the Year****Ending June 30****2026****2027**Sec. 2. **MILITARY AFFAIRS**Subdivision 1. **Total Appropriation****\$****29,487,000****\$****33,458,000**

The amounts that may be spent for each purpose are specified in the following subdivisions. The base for this appropriation is \$27,458,000 in fiscal year 2028 and each fiscal year thereafter.

<u>Subd. 2. Maintenance of Training Facilities</u>	<u>10,067,000</u>	<u>10,067,000</u>
---	-------------------	-------------------

<u>Subd. 3. General Support</u>	<u>5,006,000</u>	<u>4,977,000</u>
--	------------------	------------------

Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F). Of this amount, \$242,000 the first year is for administrative and payroll costs to operate Holistic Health and Fitness (H2F) initiatives across the Minnesota Army National Guard. This is a onetime appropriation.

<u>Subd. 4. Enlistment Incentives</u>	<u>14,114,000</u>	<u>18,114,000</u>
--	-------------------	-------------------

The base for this appropriation is \$12,114,000 in fiscal year 2028 and each fiscal year thereafter.

The appropriations in this subdivision are available until June 30, 2029.

If the amount for fiscal year 2026 is insufficient, the amount for 2027 is available in fiscal year 2026. Any unencumbered balance does not cancel at the end of the first year and is available for the second year.

<u>Subd. 5. Emergency Services</u>	<u>300,000</u>	<u>300,000</u>
---	----------------	----------------

Sec. 3. **VETERANS AFFAIRS**

<u>Subdivision 1. Total Appropriation</u>	<u>\$</u>	<u>142,457,000</u>	<u>\$</u>	<u>146,710,000</u>
--	-----------	--------------------	-----------	--------------------

The base for this appropriation is \$151,140,000 in fiscal year 2028 and each fiscal year thereafter. The amounts that may be spent for each purpose are specified in the following subdivisions.

<u>Subd. 2. Veterans Programs and Services</u>	<u>31,055,000</u>	<u>30,940,000</u>
---	-------------------	-------------------

The amounts that may be spent for each purpose are specified in the following paragraphs.

(a) **State Veterans Cemeteries.** \$3,782,000 each year is for the operation of the state veterans cemeteries.

(b) **Veterans Service Organizations.** \$500,000 each year is for grants to the following congressionally chartered veterans service organizations as designated by the commissioner: Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, and Paralyzed Veterans of America. This funding must be

allocated in direct proportion to the funding currently being provided by the commissioner to these organizations.

(c) **Honor Guards.** \$200,000 each year is for compensation for honor guards at the funerals of veterans under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.231.

(d) **Minnesota GI Bill.** \$200,000 each year is for the costs of administering the Minnesota GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits, on-the-job training, and apprenticeship program under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.791.

(e) **Gold Star Program.** \$100,000 each year is for administering the Gold Star Program for surviving family members of deceased veterans.

(f) **County Veterans Service Office.** \$1,610,000 each year is for the County Veterans Service Office grant program under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.608. Of this amount, \$20,000 is for a women veterans technical assistance coordinator, \$20,000 is for a veteran suicide prevention technical assistance coordinator, and \$20,000 is for a justice-involved veteran technical assistance coordinator. Any unencumbered balance in the first year does not cancel and is available in the second year.

(g) **Camp Bliss.** \$150,000 each year is for a grant to Independent Lifestyles, Inc., to provide therapy, transportation, and activities customized for veterans who are Minnesota residents and the veterans' spouses, domestic partners, and children at Camp Bliss in the city of Walker. The commissioner of veterans affairs must report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs on:

(1) the number of veterans and veterans' family members served; and

(2) a detailed explanation of expenditures of the grant money.

(h) **CORE Program.** \$1,525,000 the first year and \$1,225,000 the second year are for the Counseling and Case Management Outreach Referral and Education (CORE) program.

Of this amount, \$300,000 the first year is to provide:

(1) home-delivered meals to veterans outside of Hennepin and Ramsey Counties; and

(2) technical, enrollment, outreach, and volunteer recruitment assistance to member programs.

The grantee must report to the commissioner of veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by September 1 each year with a detailed explanation of how the grant money was used and the number of veterans and service members served by the program. Any unencumbered balance in the first year does not cancel at the end of the first year and is available in the second year. This is a onetime appropriation.

(i) **Recently Separated Veterans Program.** \$300,000 each year is for operation of the recently separated veterans program. The commissioner of veterans affairs may use Department of Defense and other veteran data that was provided with an appropriate disclosure to assist with connecting veterans to resources and new programming. The commissioner may use money for personnel, research, marketing, technology solutions, and professional or technical contracts.

(j) **Homeless Veterans and SOAR Program.** \$1,344,000 each year is to operate the homeless veteran registry and homeless programs and to assist veterans, former service members, and veterans' and former service members' dependents with obtaining federal benefits through the Social Security Administration. The commissioner of veterans affairs may use money for personnel, training, research, marketing, and professional or technical contracts.

(k) **State Soldiers Assistance Program.** \$5,600,000 each year is for veteran financial assistance through the state soldiers assistance program.

(l) **Higher Education Veterans Assistance.** \$1,629,000 each year is for veterans higher education assistance.

(m) **Claims and Outreach Office.** \$3,621,000 each year is for the claims and outreach office to assist veterans and the veterans' families in accessing benefits and services.

(n) Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans. \$1,075,000 each year is for grants to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans to provide assistance throughout Minnesota to veterans and veterans' families who are homeless or in danger of homelessness, including assistance with:

- (1) supportive services to maintain housing;
- (2) employment;
- (3) legal issues;
- (4) housing and housing-related costs;
- (5) transportation;
- (6) the acquisition and creation of permanent supportive housing; and
- (7) property management of permanent supportive housing.

Any unencumbered balance remaining in this paragraph in the first year does not cancel and is available for the second year. Assistance authorized under this paragraph must be provided only to a veteran who has resided in Minnesota for 30 days prior to the veteran's application for assistance and according to other guidelines established by the commissioner. To avoid duplication of services, the commissioner must ensure that this assistance is coordinated with all other available programs for veterans.

(o) Veterans of Special Guerilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force. \$118,000 the first year is for the commissioner to staff and support the work of the Veterans of Special Guerilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force.

(p) Hometown Hero Outdoors. \$100,000 the first year is for a grant to Hometown Hero Outdoors, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization based in Stillwater, Minnesota, to fund outdoor recreational activities and mental health services for currently serving military personnel and veterans to promote positive mental health and interactions with mental health service professionals; to promote longevity and quality of life through outdoor activities and mental health services, including public education; and to ensure that the organization is able to continue supporting persons who are currently serving or have served in the

military. Hometown Hero Outdoors must report to the commissioner of veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance no later than September 1, 2026. The report must include, at a minimum, a detailed explanation of how the grant money was used and the number of veterans served by the program.

(q) **Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum.** \$300,000 each year is for a grant to the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum for museum staff to provide direct services to veterans and their families.

Subd. 3. **Veterans Health Care**

111,402,000

115,770,000

(a) \$110,302,000 the first year and \$114,670,000 the second year may be transferred to a veterans homes special revenue account in the special revenue fund in the same manner as other receipts are deposited according to Minnesota Statutes, section 198.34, and are appropriated to the commissioner of veterans affairs for the operation of veterans homes facilities and programs. The base for this transfer is \$119,100,000 in fiscal year 2028 and each fiscal year thereafter.

(b) The department shall seek opportunities to maximize federal reimbursements of Medicare-eligible expenses and provide annual reports to the commissioner of management and budget on the federal Medicare reimbursements that are received. Contingent upon future federal Medicare receipts, reductions to the veterans homes' general fund appropriation may be made.

(c) \$400,000 each year is for the department to staff Veteran Community Health Navigators in community-based hospitals.

(d) \$700,000 each year is for the department to operate the veteran suicide prevention program. The commissioner shall develop a comprehensive plan to prevent Minnesota veterans from dying by suicide. The plan must include:

(1) a community integration and collaboration strategy that brings together veteran-serving organizations to provide veterans with coordinated services and supports, including services and supports related to

employment, health, housing, benefits, recreation, education, and social connections;

(2) strategies to promote a sense of belonging and purpose among veterans by connecting veterans with each other, with civilians, and with the veteran's communities through a range of activities, including physical activity, community service, and disaster response efforts; and

(3) an implementation strategy that identifies opportunities to coordinate existing efforts within federal, state, local, and Tribal governments and nongovernmental entities and includes a description of the policy changes and resources that are required to prevent veteran suicides.

The commissioner must submit a report containing the required plan to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by February 15, 2026.

(e) The commissioner of veterans affairs is not required to perform the annual calculation of the cost of care for veterans homes in Montevideo, Preston, and Bemidji in the first year and second year. In the first year and second year, the commissioner must calculate the average daily cost of care per resident by averaging the cost of care for veterans homes in Luverne and Fergus Falls. The commissioner must only use this method of calculating the cost of care for veterans homes in the first year and second year. This paragraph expires June 30, 2027.

Sec. 4. Laws 2023, chapter 38, article 1, section 3, subdivision 2, as amended by Laws 2024, chapter 100, section 23, is amended to read:

Subd. 2. Veterans Programs and Services

56,523,000

31,214,000

The amounts that may be spent for each purpose are specified in the following subdivisions. The base is \$30,258,000 in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

(a) State's Veterans Cemeteries. \$4,282,000 each year is for the operation of the state's veterans cemeteries. The base for this appropriation is \$3,782,000 in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

(b) **Veterans Service Organizations.** \$500,000 each year is for grants to the following congressionally chartered veterans service organizations as designated by the commissioner: Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, and Paralyzed Veterans of America. This funding must be allocated in direct proportion to the funding currently being provided by the commissioner to these organizations.

(c) **Honor Guards.** \$200,000 each year is for compensation for honor guards at the funerals of veterans under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.231.

(d) **Minnesota GI Bill.** \$200,000 each year is for the costs of administering the Minnesota GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits, on-the-job training, and apprenticeship program under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.791.

(e) **Gold Star Program.** \$100,000 each year is for administering the Gold Star Program for surviving family members of deceased veterans.

(f) **County Veterans Service Office.** \$1,550,000 each year is for funding the County Veterans Service Office grant program under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.608.

(g) **Camp Bliss.** \$150,000 each year is for a grant to Camp Bliss as provided under article 2, section 9.

(h) **Veterans on the Lake.** \$50,000 each year is for a grant to Veterans on the Lake for expenses related to retreats for veterans, including therapy, transportation, and activities customized for veterans. These are onetime appropriations.

(i) **Veteran Resilience Project.** \$300,000 each year is for a grant to the veteran resilience project. Grant funds must be used to make eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy available to veterans, veterans' spouses, current military service members, and current military service members' spouses who are suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder and trauma. The base for this appropriation is \$200,000 in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

The veteran resilience project must report to the commissioner of veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by January 15 of each year on the program. The report must include an overview of the program's budget, a detailed explanation of program expenditures, the number of veterans and service members served by the program, and a list and explanation of the services provided to program participants.

(j) **CORE Program.** \$1,225,000 each year is for the Counseling and Case Management Outreach Referral and Education (CORE) program.

(k) **LinkVet Call Center.** \$369,000 each year is for the operation of the state's LinkVet Call Center.

(l) **Recently Separated Veterans Program.** \$350,000 each year is for operation of the recently separated veterans program. The commissioner of veterans affairs may use Department of Defense and other veteran data that were provided with an appropriate disclosure to assist with connecting veterans to resources and new programming. The commissioner may use money for personnel, research, marketing, technology solutions, and professional or technical contracts. The base for this appropriation is \$300,000 in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

(m) **Homeless Veterans and SOAR Program.** \$1,035,000 each year is to operate the homeless veteran registry and homeless programs and to assist veterans, former service members, and veterans' and former service members' dependents with obtaining federal benefits through the Social Security Administration. The commissioner of veterans affairs may use money for personnel, training, research, marketing, and professional or technical contracts. The base for this appropriation is \$1,344,000 in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

(n) **Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans.** \$7,865,000 the first year and \$1,075,000 the second year are for grants to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans to provide assistance throughout Minnesota to veterans and veterans' families who are homeless or in danger of homelessness, including assistance with:

- (1) supportive services to maintain housing;
- (2) employment;
- (3) legal issues;
- (4) housing and housing-related costs;
- (5) transportation;
- (6) the acquisition and creation of permanent supportive housing; and
- (7) property management of permanent supportive housing.

Of these amounts, \$6,350,000 the first year is for the establishment of permanent supportive housing options for homeless veterans and former service members. This is a onetime appropriation and is available until June 30, 2026. \$440,000 the first year is for the direct veteran assistance grant. This is a onetime appropriation. Any unencumbered balance remaining in this subdivision in the first year for grants to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans does not cancel and is available for the second year. Assistance authorized under this paragraph must be provided only to a veteran who has resided in Minnesota for 30 days prior to the veteran's application for assistance and according to other guidelines established by the commissioner. To avoid duplication of services, the commissioner must ensure that this assistance is coordinated with all other available programs for veterans.

(o) **Veterans Bonus Program.** \$15,000,000 the first year is for service bonuses to Post-9/11 Veterans and Gold Star families under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.79. This is a onetime appropriation and is available until June 30, 2024.

(p) **Metro Meals on Wheels.** \$540,000 each year is for a grant to Metro Meals on Wheels to provide: (1) home-delivered meals to veterans; and (2) technical, enrollment, outreach, and volunteer recruitment assistance to member programs. Metro Meals on Wheels must report to the commissioner of veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by September 1 each year with a detailed explanation of how the grant

money was used and the number of veterans and service members served by the program. ~~This is a onetime appropriation. Any unencumbered balance does not cancel at the end of the first year and is available for the second year.~~ This is a onetime appropriation and is available until June 30, 2027.

(q) **Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum.** \$225,000 the second year is for a grant to the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum for museum staff to provide direct services to veterans and their families. The base for this appropriation is \$300,000 in fiscal year 2026 and each fiscal year thereafter.

(r) **Every Third Saturday.** \$100,000 each year is for a grant to Every Third Saturday to provide veterans with emergency assistance and internships. Every Third Saturday must report to the commissioner of veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance no later than September 1, 2024, and by September 1 of each subsequent year. Each report must include, at a minimum, a detailed explanation of how the grant money was used and the number of veterans served by the program. ~~These are onetime appropriations.~~ These are onetime appropriations and are available until June 30, 2026.

(s) **Veteran Homelessness Initiative.** \$4,311,000 the first year and \$1,311,000 the second year are for an initiative to prevent and end veteran homelessness.

(t) **Veterans Campground Wastewater System Upgrades.** \$744,000 the first year is for one or more grants to the Veterans Campground on Big Marine Lake, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, to design, engineer, permit, and construct wastewater systems on campground property to increase the capacity of wastewater systems. This is a onetime appropriation.

ARTICLE 2

MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS POLICY

Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 13.461, subdivision 27, is amended to read:

Subd. 27. ~~State soldiers assistance program~~ **Veterans affairs programs.** Access to information for purposes of verifying eligibility for the State Soldiers Assistance Program, the Veterans Stable Housing Initiative, and veterans programs is governed by section 197.065.

Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 192.49, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1. **Officers.** Every commissioned officer of the military forces shall receive from the state, while engaged in ~~any state active service ordered by the governor as defined in section 190.05, subdivision 5a,~~ pay and allowances at the rate now or hereafter paid or allowed by law to officers of the same grade and length of service in the armed forces of the United States, but not less than \$130 a day.

Sec. 3. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 192.49, subdivision 2, is amended to read:

Subd. 2. **Enlisted persons.** When called into state active service by the governor, other than for encampment or maneuvers, including the time necessarily consumed in travel, each enlisted person of the military forces shall be paid by the state the pay and the allowances, when not furnished in kind, provided by law for enlisted persons of similar grade, rating, and length of service in the armed forces of the United States, or \$130 a day, whichever is more.

Sec. 4. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 192.49, is amended by adding a subdivision to read:

Subd. 2a. **Pension offset stipend.** The adjutant general is authorized to pay service members ordered into state active service a stipend equivalent to five percent of basic pay for the period of duty to compensate the service member for pension inequity compared to similar federal service.

Sec. 5. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 193.143, is amended to read:

193.143 STATE ARMORY BUILDING COMMISSION, POWERS.

Such corporation, subject to the conditions and limitations prescribed in sections 193.141 to 193.149, shall possess all the powers of a body corporate necessary and convenient to accomplish the objectives and perform the duties prescribed by sections 193.141 to 193.149, including the following, which shall not be construed as a limitation upon the general powers hereby conferred:

(1) To acquire by lease, purchase, gift, or condemnation proceedings all necessary right, title, and interest in and to the lands required for a site for a new armory and all other real or personal property required for the purposes contemplated by the Military Code and to hold and dispose of the same, subject to the conditions and limitations herein prescribed; provided that any such real or personal property or interest therein may be so acquired or accepted subject to any condition which may be imposed thereon by the grantor or donor and agreed to by such corporation not inconsistent with the proper use of such property by the state for armory or military purposes as herein provided.

(2) To exercise the power of eminent domain in the manner provided by chapter 117, for the purpose of acquiring any property which such corporation is herein authorized to acquire by condemnation; provided, that the corporation may take possession of any such property so to be acquired at any time after the filing of the petition describing the same in condemnation proceedings; provided further, that this shall not preclude the corporation from abandoning the condemnation of any such property in any case where possession thereof has not been taken.

(3) To construct and equip new armories as authorized herein; to pay therefor out of the funds obtained as hereinafter provided and to hold, manage, and dispose of such armory, equipment, and site as hereinafter provided. The total amount of bonds issued on account of such armories shall not exceed the amount of the cost thereof; provided also, that the total bonded indebtedness of the commission shall not at any time exceed the aggregate sum of ~~\$15,000,000~~ \$45,000,000.

(4) To provide partnerships with federal and state governments and to match federal and local funds, when available.

(5) To sue and be sued.

(6) To contract and be contracted with in any matter connected with any purpose or activity within the powers of such corporations as herein specified; provided, that no officer or member of such corporation shall be personally interested, directly or indirectly, in any contract in which such corporation is interested.

(7) To employ any and all professional and nonprofessional services and all agents, employees, workers, and servants necessary and proper for the purposes and activities of such corporation as authorized or contemplated herein and to pay for the same out of any portion of the income of the corporation available for such purposes or activities. The officers and members of such corporation shall not receive any compensation therefrom, but may receive their reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with the performance of their duties; provided however, that whenever the duties of any member of the commission require full time and attention the commission may compensate the member therefor at such rates as it may determine.

(8) To borrow money and issue bonds for the purposes and in the manner and within the limitations herein specified, and to pledge any and all property and income of such corporation acquired or received as herein provided to secure the payment of such bonds, subject to the provisions and limitations herein prescribed, and to redeem any such bonds if so provided therein or in the mortgage or trust deed accompanying the same.

(9) To use for the following purposes any available money received by such corporation from any source as herein provided in excess of those required for the payment of the cost of such armory and for the payment of any bonds issued by the corporation and interest thereon according to the terms of such bonds or of any mortgage or trust deed accompanying the same:

(a) to pay the necessary incidental expenses of carrying on the business and activities of the corporation as herein authorized;

(b) to pay the cost of operating, maintaining, repairing, and improving such new armories;

(c) if any further excess money remains, to purchase upon the open market at or above or below the face or par value thereof any bonds issued by the corporation as herein authorized, provided that any bonds so purchased shall thereupon be canceled.

(10) To adopt and use a corporate seal.

(11) To adopt all needful bylaws and rules for the conduct of business and affairs of such corporation and for the management and use of all armories while under the ownership and control of such corporation as herein provided, not inconsistent with the use of such armory for armory or military purposes.

(12) Such corporation shall issue no stock.

(13) No officer or member of such corporation shall have any personal share or interest in any funds or property of the corporation or be subject to any personal liability by reason of any liability of the corporation.

(14) The Minnesota State Armory Building Commission created under section 193.142 shall keep all money and credits received by it as a single fund, to be designated as the "Minnesota State Armory Building Commission fund," with separate accounts for each armory; and the commission may make transfers of money from funds appertaining to any armory under its control for use for any other such armory; provided

such transfers shall be made only from money on hand, from time to time, in excess of the amounts required to meet payments of interest or principal on bonds or other obligations appertaining to the armory to which such funds pertain and only when necessary to pay expenses of construction, operation, maintenance, debt service, and other obligations reasonable and necessary, of such other armory; provided further, no such transfer of any money paid for the support of any armory by the municipality in which such armory is situated shall be made by the commission.

(15) The corporation created under section 193.142 may designate one or more state or national banks as depositories of its funds, and may provide, upon such conditions as the corporation may determine, that the treasurer of the corporation shall be exempt from personal liability for loss of funds deposited in any such depository due to the insolvency or other acts or omissions of such depository.

(16) The governor is empowered to apply for grants of money, equipment, and materials which may be made available to the states by the federal government for leasing, building, and equipping armories for the use of the military forces of the state which are reserve components of the armed forces of the United States, whenever the governor is satisfied that the conditions under which such grants are offered by the federal government, are for the best interests of the state and are not inconsistent with the laws of the state relating to armories, and to accept such grants in the name of the state. The Minnesota State Armory Building Commission is designated as the agency of the state to receive such grants and to use them for armory purposes as prescribed in this chapter, and by federal laws, and regulations not inconsistent therewith.

Sec. 6. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.065, is amended to read:

197.065 ACCESS TO DATABASE.

(a) Notwithstanding section 13.46, subdivision 2, the commissioner of veterans affairs may electronically access the MAXIS database maintained by the Department of ~~Human Services~~ Children, Youth, and Families for the purpose of verifying eligibility status of applicants for benefits under the State Soldiers Assistance Program, the Veterans Stable Housing Initiative, and veterans programs. The commissioner may electronically access the MAXIS database to ensure that veterans are connected to all available state and federal resources for which the veterans are eligible.

(b) In order to access any private data on individuals, as defined by section 13.02, subdivision 12, pursuant to paragraph (a), the commissioner of veterans affairs must have received informed consent from the subject of the data.

Sec. 7. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.236, subdivision 8, is amended to read:

Subd. 8. **Eligibility.** Cemeteries must be operated solely for the burial of service members who die on active duty, eligible veterans, and their spouses and dependent children, as defined in United States Code, title 38, section ~~101~~ 2402, paragraph ~~(2)~~ (a), subparagraphs 1 to 5 and 7.

Sec. 8. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.236, subdivision 9, is amended to read:

Subd. 9. **Burial fees.** (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs shall establish a fee schedule, which may be adjusted from time to time, for the interment of eligible spouses and dependent children. The fees shall cover as nearly as practicable the actual costs of interment, excluding the value of the plot.

(b) Upon application, the commissioner may waive or reduce the burial fee for an indigent eligible person. The commissioner shall ~~develop~~ maintain a policy, eligibility standards, and application form for requests to waive or reduce the burial fee to indigent eligible applicants.

(c) No plot or interment fees may be charged for the burial of service members who die on active duty or eligible veterans, as defined in United States Code, title 38, section ~~404~~ 2402, paragraph ~~(2)~~ (a), subparagraphs 1 to 4 and 7.

Sec. 9. [197.448] VETERAN OF THE SECRET WAR IN LAOS.

Subdivision 1. Definition. As used in this section, the term "veteran of the Secret War in Laos" means a person who resides in Minnesota and who:

(1) was naturalized as provided in section 2(1) of the federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000, Public Law 106-207; or

(2) is a person who the commissioner of veterans affairs determines served honorably with a special guerrilla unit or with irregular forces that operated from a base in Laos in support of the armed forces of the United States at any time during the period beginning February 28, 1961, and ending May 14, 1975, and is a citizen of the United States or an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States.

Subd. 2. Eligibility for benefits and privileges. (a) A veteran of the Secret War in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (1), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) the day following the effective date of this act.

(b) A veteran of the Secret War in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (2), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) after the commissioner of veterans affairs verifies the person's veteran status. The commissioner must not begin accepting applications for verification under this paragraph until the legislature enacts criteria and a protocol to determine:

(1) which Minnesotans served in special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

(2) which of the Minnesotans who served in special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of Minnesota veterans benefits.

(c) If the commissioner verifies a person's status as a veteran of the Secret War in Laos, the commissioner must provide the person with a certificate of eligibility for the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (d) on a form developed by the commissioner for this purpose. The commissioner must develop the form required under this paragraph no later than September 15, 2025.

(d) The following statutory benefits and privileges available to a veteran, as defined in section 197.447, are also available to a veteran of the Secret War in Laos: section 171.07, subdivision 15 (veteran designation on drivers' licenses and state identification cards); section 197.23 (purchase of grave markers); section 197.231 (honor guards); section 197.236 (state veterans cemeteries); section 197.455 (veterans preference); section 197.4551 (permissive preference for veterans in private employment); section 197.63 (vital records, certified copies); section 197.65 (renewal of professional licenses, motor vehicle registration, and drivers' licenses); and section 197.987 (honor and remember flag).

Sec. 10. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.608, subdivision 6, is amended to read:

Subd. 6. Grant amount. (a) Each county is eligible to receive an annual grant of \$7,500 for the following purposes:

(1) to provide outreach to the county's veterans;

(2) to assist in the reintegration of combat veterans into society;

(3) to collaborate with other social service agencies, educational institutions, and other community organizations for the purposes of enhancing services offered to veterans;

(4) to reduce homelessness among veterans; and

(5) to enhance the operations of the county veterans service office.

(b) In addition to the grant amount in paragraph (a), each county is eligible to receive an additional annual grant under this paragraph. The amount of each additional annual grant must be determined by the commissioner and may not exceed:

(1) \$0, if the county's veteran population is less than 1,000;

(2) \$2,500, if the county's veteran population is 1,000 or more but less than 3,000;

(3) \$5,000, if the county's veteran population is 3,000 or more but less than 5,000;

(4) \$7,500, if the county's veteran population is 5,000 or more but less than 10,000;

(5) \$10,000, if the county's veteran population is 10,000 or more but less than 20,000;

(6) \$15,000, if the county's veteran population is 20,000 or more but less than 30,000; or

(7) \$20,000, if the county's veteran population is 30,000 or more.

(c) The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers is eligible to receive an annual grant of ~~\$100,000~~ \$160,000. The grant ~~shall~~ must be used for administrative costs of the association, certification of mandated county veterans service officer training and accreditation, and costs associated with reintegration services. Up to \$60,000 of this amount may be used to train technical assistance coordinators and for technical assistance coordinators to travel to consult with Minnesota counties on specific areas of expertise upon request. The Minnesota Association of County Veterans Service Officers executive board must select technical assistance coordinators, who are either county veterans service officers or assistant county veterans service officers, to serve for a minimum of one year.

(d) The veteran population of each county shall be determined by the figure supplied by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, as adopted by the commissioner.

Sec. 11. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.75, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

(b) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of veterans affairs.

(c) "Deceased veteran" means a veteran who has died as a result of the person's military service, as determined by the United States Veterans Administration, and who was a resident of this state: (1) within six months of entering the United States armed forces, or (2) for the six months preceding the veteran's date of death.

(d) "Eligible child" means a person who:

(1) is the natural or adopted child or stepchild of a deceased veteran; and

(2) is a student making satisfactory academic progress at an eligible institution of higher education.

(e) "Eligible institution" means a postsecondary educational institution located in this state that either is operated by this state or the Board of Regents of the University of Minnesota, or is licensed or registered with the Office of Higher Education.

(f) "Eligible spouse" means the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran, regardless of whether the surviving spouse remarries.

(g) "Eligible veteran" means a veteran who:

(1) is a student making satisfactory academic progress at an eligible institution of higher education;

(2) had Minnesota as the person's state of residence at the time of the person's enlistment or any reenlistment into the United States armed forces, as shown by the person's federal form DD-214 or other official documentation to the satisfaction of the commissioner;

(3) except for benefits under this section, has no remaining military or veteran-related educational assistance benefits for which the person may have been entitled; and

(4) while using the educational assistance authorized in this section, remains a resident student as defined in section 136A.101, subdivision 8.

(h) "Satisfactory academic progress" has the meaning given in section 136A.101, subdivision 10.

(i) "Student" has the meaning given in section 136A.101, subdivision 7.

(j) "Veteran" has the meaning given in section 197.447.

Sec. 12. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.791, subdivision 4, is amended to read:

Subd. 4. **Eligibility.** (a) A person is eligible for educational assistance under subdivision 5 if:

(1) the person is:

(i) a veteran who is serving or has served honorably in any branch or unit of the United States armed forces at any time;

(ii) a nonveteran who has served honorably for a total of five years or more cumulatively as a member of the Minnesota National Guard or any other active or reserve component of the United States armed forces, and any part of that service occurred on or after September 11, 2001;

(iii) the surviving spouse or child of a person who has served in the military and who has died as a direct result of that military service, only if the surviving spouse or child is eligible to receive federal education benefits under United States Code, title 38, chapter 33, as amended, or United States Code, title 38, chapter 35, as amended, except that remarriage does not terminate a surviving spouse's eligibility; or

(iv) the spouse or child of a person who has served in the military at any time and who has a total and permanent service-connected disability as rated by the United States Veterans Administration, only if the spouse or child is eligible to receive federal education benefits under United States Code, title 38, chapter 33, as amended, or United States Code, title 38, chapter 35, as amended; and

(2) the person receiving the educational assistance is a Minnesota resident, as defined in section 136A.101, subdivision 8; and

(3) the person receiving the educational assistance:

- (i) is an undergraduate or graduate student at an eligible institution;
 - (ii) is maintaining satisfactory academic progress as defined by the institution for students participating in federal Title IV programs;
 - (iii) is enrolled in an education program leading to a certificate, diploma, or degree at an eligible institution;
 - (iv) has applied for educational assistance under this section prior to the end of the academic term for which the assistance is being requested;
 - (v) is in compliance with child support payment requirements under section 136A.121, subdivision 2, clause (5); and
 - (vi) has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- (b) A person's eligibility terminates when the person becomes eligible for benefits under section 135A.52.
- (c) To determine eligibility, the commissioner may require official documentation, including the person's federal form DD-214 or other official military discharge papers; correspondence from the United States Veterans Administration; birth certificate; marriage certificate; proof of enrollment at an eligible institution; signed affidavits; proof of residency; proof of identity; or any other official documentation the commissioner considers necessary to determine eligibility.
- (d) The commissioner may deny eligibility or terminate benefits under this section to any person who has not provided sufficient documentation to determine eligibility for the program. An applicant may appeal the commissioner's eligibility determination or termination of benefits in writing to the commissioner at any time. The commissioner must rule on any application or appeal within 30 days of receipt of all documentation that the commissioner requires. The decision of the commissioner regarding an appeal is final. However, an applicant whose appeal of an eligibility determination has been rejected by the commissioner may submit an additional appeal of that determination in writing to the commissioner at any time that the applicant is able to provide substantively significant additional information regarding the applicant's eligibility for the program. An approval of an applicant's eligibility by the commissioner following an appeal by the applicant is not retroactively effective for more than one year or the semester of the person's original application, whichever is later.
- (e) Upon receiving an application with insufficient documentation to determine eligibility, the commissioner must notify the applicant within 30 days of receipt of the application that the application is being suspended pending receipt by the commissioner of sufficient documentation from the applicant to determine eligibility.

Sec. 13. ADVISORY TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED; VETERANS OF SPECIAL GUERRILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS.

Subdivision 1. Establishment; membership. (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs must establish a Veterans of Special Guerilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force.

(b) The advisory task force must consist of the commissioner, or a designee, and the following additional 12 members appointed by the commissioner, except as otherwise provided:

(1) a representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the Commanders Task Force;

(2) one member with direct experience in Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Forces operations during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2);

(3) a United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during the Vietnam War;

(4) a Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces;

(5) two veterans of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos;

(6) one member with expertise in the history of allied irregular and surrogate forces during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2);

(7) one member with direct experience in United States intelligence or special operations in Southeast Asia during the dates established in Minnesota Statutes, section 197.448, subdivision 1, clause (2); and

(8) four legislators, with one member each appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, the house Democratic-Farmer-Labor leader, the senate majority leader, and the senate minority leader.

Subd. 2. Duties; report. (a) The task force must:

(1) establish criteria for determining which Minnesotans served in the special guerrilla units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

(2) establish criteria and a protocol to determine which Minnesotans who served in the special guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of the benefits of a veteran under Minnesota law and which veterans benefits should be extended to these Minnesotans.

(b) The task force must prepare a report to the legislature that includes the findings, criteria, protocol, and recommendations required under paragraph (a). The commissioner must deliver the report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by February 15, 2026.

Subd. 3. Administration; terms of membership. The commissioner shall convene the first meeting of the advisory task force by September 15, 2025, and provide staff support to the advisory task force. Minnesota Statutes, section 15.059, subdivision 6, governs the terms and removal of members of the advisory task force. Members of the task force serve without compensation or per diem.

Subd. 4. Expiration. The task force expires February 15, 2026.

Sec. 14. GOLD STAR AND BLUE STAR FAMILIES; MEMORIAL PLAQUE.

Subdivision 1. Purpose. The state of Minnesota wishes to honor and recognize the service and sacrifices of Gold Star and Blue Star families.

Subd. 2. Memorial plaque. The commissioner of administration shall place a memorial plaque in the court of honor on State Capitol grounds to recognize the service and sacrifices of Minnesota's Gold Star and Blue Star families. The process for determining design and location of the Gold Star and Blue Star memorial will follow the Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board commemorative works rules under Minnesota Rules, part 2400.2703. The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board shall select a design from the submitted designs to use as a basis for final production. The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning Board must include the commissioner of veterans affairs on the design review committee established under Minnesota Rules, part 2400.2703. The memorial design must be furnished by the person or group who submit the design at no cost to the state.

Presented to the governor May 20, 2025

Signed by the governor May 23, 2025, 10:52 a.m.