

# Massachusetts State Veteran's Benefits



The state of Massachusetts provides several veteran benefits. This section offers a brief description of each of the following benefits.

- Housing Benefits
- Financial Assistance Benefits
- Education Benefits
- Recently-Returned Combat Veterans
- Other State Veteran Benefits

## Massachusetts Veteran Housing Programs

### **Public Assistance**

Under Chapter 115 of Massachusetts General Laws, the Commonwealth provides a uniform program of financial and medical assistance for indigent veterans and their dependents.

Qualifying veterans and their dependents receive necessary financial assistance for food, shelter, clothing, housing supplies, and medical care in accordance with a formula which takes into account the number of dependants and income from all sources. Eligible dependents of deceased veterans are provided with the same benefits as they would were the veteran still living.

Visit the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services website <http://www.mass.gov/veterans/benefits-and-services> for contact information and benefits assistance.

## **Massachusetts Financial Assistance Benefits**

### **Tax Exemptions**

Property Tax: Eligible veterans, spouses, and parents. To qualify, all veterans (and spouses\* where applicable) must:

- be at least 10% disabled by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- be legal residents of Massachusetts
- be occupying the property as his/her domicile on July 1 in the year of application
- have lived in Massachusetts for at least six months prior to entering the service (spouses exempted) or
- have lived in Massachusetts for five consecutive years immediately prior to filing for a property tax exemption.

### **Motor Vehicle Tax:**

Disabled veterans of World War I, World War II, Korea, or Vietnam who by reason of service in the U.S. armed forces have suffered the loss of, or permanent loss of the use of, one or both feet or one or both hands or the loss of sight in one eye or who have permanent impairment of vision of both eyes (see statute for details) and are certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are eligible for motor vehicle excise exemption (applicable only to one motor vehicle owned and registered for personal, non-commercial use).

Sales Tax Exemption for Disabled Veterans:

Disabled veterans who by reason of service in the U.S. armed forces have suffered the loss of, or permanent loss of the use of, both legs or both arms or one leg and one arm are eligible for a motor vehicle sales tax exemption (applicable only to one motor vehicle owned and registered for personal, non-commercial use).

### **Annuities**

An annuity in the amount of \$2000, which is payable biannually on August 1st and February 1st in two installments of \$1000 each is available for certain veterans and their spouses, as well as Gold Star Parents. This benefit is provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, through the Department of Veterans' Services.

### **Bonuses**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts provides a bonus to veterans who were domiciled in Massachusetts immediately prior to entry in the armed forces. In case of the death of a veteran, the spouse and children, mother or father, brother or sister or other dependents of the deceased veteran (in that order) are eligible for a bonus.

- World War II Bonus
- Korean War Bonus
- Vietnam War Bonus
- Persian Gulf War Bonus
- Welcome Home Bonus

Visit the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services website <http://www.mass.gov/veterans/benefits-and-services> for contact information and benefits assistance.

## **Massachusetts Education Benefits**

### **Education Financial Assistance**

Tuition Waivers: A Tuition waiver for all Massachusetts veterans to all state colleges and universities

Veterans of Massachusetts can be eligible for a tuition waiver at any state-supported course in an undergraduate degree program offered by a public college or university. To be eligible, a veteran must also be a legal resident of Massachusetts and he/she must not be in default of any federal student loans.

Veterans will be eligible on a space-available basis for a waiver of full or partial tuition based on proper documentation of the eligibility of the veteran. Space availability shall be determined in accordance with normal practices and procedures as published by each institution, i.e., the individual college or university.

**Tuition and Fee Waivers for Guard Members:** Tuition and fee waiver for members of the Massachusetts National Guard at all state colleges and universities

The Massachusetts National Guard Education Assistance Program provides a 100% tuition and fee waiver for Massachusetts National Guard soldiers attending a state college, university, or community college program. Generally, these state-supported programs are offered during the day as part of a degree program. Your assistance can continue as long as you are in good standing academically and until you have reached 130 semester hours.

**Massachusetts Public Service Grant Program:** The Massachusetts Public Service Grant Program was established in recognition of the hardship that a family experiences upon the loss of a parent and or spouse who is killed or missing in the line of public service duty in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. This grant program was established to provide educational opportunity to the remaining family members. The Public Service Grant Program is the only scholarship program not based on demonstrated financial need, but rather entitlement.

**Deployed Troops Get Break on Student Loans:** Service members who have been deployed or mobilized are not required to make certain student loan payments during their absences. This applies to members of the National Guard and Ready Reserves who have been called to active duty, as well as to active duty members who duty station has been changed as a result of a military mobilization. The regulations apply to students loans made under the Federal Family Education Loan, William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan and Federal Perkins Loan programs. Active duty members who have not begun the repayment period on their loans should continue to receive a grace period (generally six months) before repaying their loans. Students who were in school at the time of mobilization must also be given a reasonable period to resume school before lenders request payments.

### **Upward Bound Program**

The Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) Program at the University of Massachusetts Boston provides a unique opportunity for veterans of all ages to gain access to information about college and career awareness, acquire the academic skills required for entry into higher education and/or to acquire the equivalent of a high school diploma. Services are offered continuously with various workshops, self-paced computer tutorials, individualized tutoring and classroom-based instruction. All Veterans Upward Bound classes and supplies are FREE to qualified veterans.

Eligibility: Must have served at least 181 days of active duty military service.

Discharge must have been other than dishonorable. Low income and first generation college attendance. (You may also be eligible if you meet all the former requirements and are solely low income or solely a first generation college student. Academic need.

### **Operation Recognition**

The Welcome Home Bill (signed November 11, 2005) allows high schools to award diplomas to World War II, Korean, and Vietnam veterans who left school for good upon being drafted or enlisting in the military.

### **Special Commission to Study Higher Education Tuition & Fee Waivers for Veterans**

In November 2005, the Legislature enacted "The Welcome Home Bill," an act providing benefits to servicemembers, veterans, and their families. The new law provides for many benefits including a waiver of tuition and fees for all members of the Massachusetts National Guard who chose to attend state institutions of higher

education. Section 12 of the "The Welcome Home Bill" also created a Special Commission to "study tuition and fee waiver programs' for veterans."

Visit the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services website <http://www.mass.gov/veterans/benefits-and-services> for contact information and benefits assistance.

## **Massachusetts Recently-Returned Combat Veterans**

### **Welcome Home Bonus**

You are eligible if you meet the following criteria: six months domicile in Massachusetts immediately prior to entry into the armed forces service, beginning September 11, 2001, and discharge under honorable conditions.

- Servicemembers who served active duty in Iraq or Afghanistan receive \$1000.
- Servicemembers with six months or more active service, stateside or outside the continental limits of the United States, receive \$500.

### **Civil Service and Veterans' Preference**

If you are a Massachusetts veteran, as defined in the Introduction above, you are entitled to veterans' preference in civil service exams. If you attain a score of 70% or higher, you are entitled to go to the top of the exam list, with disabled veterans having top priority. If you apply for a promotional exam, you get two points added to your score. If you apply for a civil service job for which there is no exam, you are entitled to veterans' preference in a "provisional appointment." If you apply for a position in the labor force, you are not required to take an exam and you go to the top of the list.

### **Financial and Civil Protections**

You have certain financial and civil protections under both federal and state versions of the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act. These protections occur when you enter military service, and when you are called up for active duty as a member of the Reserve or Guard. Under this law, your protection begins on the date you *enter* active service, or the date your orders *begin*, and generally terminates within 30 to 180 days after the date of your discharge depending on the right. To receive some of the protections, you have to be prepared to show that military service has had a "material effect" on the legal or financial matter involved.

### **Employment Opportunities**

There are numerous federal and state programs available to you if you are seeking employment. VOICE, or Veterans' Outreach Initiative for Competitive Employment, located at the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services is a good place to start your search, because they can put you in touch with the various federal and state vocational rehabilitation, career counseling, and job network services located within the Commonwealth.

### **Education**

If you are a veteran, as defined in the Introduction, Massachusetts provides you a full or partial tuition waiver for any state-supported course in an undergraduate degree program or certificate program at the school's discretion. These waivers are also referred to as "categorical waivers." Call the college or university where you are interested in enrolling and identify yourself as a veteran looking to use the tuition waiver benefit and ask for the veterans' representative. As to tuition waivers for graduate school, it depends on the institution. If you are a member of the Guard, see below for additional tuition waiver benefits.

If you are a member of the Massachusetts Air or Army National Guard you may take advantage of several programs that will allow you to waive tuition at state schools in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts National Guard Education Assistance Program provides a 100% tuition and fee waiver for Massachusetts National Guard soldiers attending a

state college, university, or community college program. The fee waiver program is a result of the Welcome Home Bill (HB 4469) signed on November 11, 2005. The fee waiver is not effective until July 2006 and is not retroactive. Generally, these state-supported programs are offered during the day as part of a degree program. Your assistance can continue as long as you are in good standing academically and until you have reached 130 semester hours. Please contact the college or university veteran's representative for details about this program.

Qualifying Guard members can take advantage of another educational program called Federal Tuition Assistance (FTA). The FTA offers \$4,500 per fiscal year to be used at regionally or nationally accredited, public or private colleges, universities, vocational, technical, or trade schools located inside or outside the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The FTA can offer soldiers up to \$250 per semester hour for tuition and up to 100% of fees that are charged to all students for enrollment purposes or fees directly related to the instruction of the course. Yes! This means that you can also get help paying for fees at Massachusetts state colleges and universities.

### **Housing**

When you return from active duty, we hope that you know where you will live. Unfortunately some veterans may have lost their housing and are having trouble finding a place to live or having trouble paying the rent or mortgage. The information included below may help you solve your housing problems. If you are having any of these troubles, immediately call or visit the Veterans' Agent in the community where you live or want to live.

The first place to visit is your local Veterans' Agent in the community where you live or want to live. There are also nine state-funded Outreach Centers in every region of the state, which provide help to veterans who are searching for housing. Some Outreach Centers also provide supportive housing for homeless veterans. The VA Medical Centers in Bedford, Boston, Brockton, and Springfield have Homeless Coordinators who can help. Women veterans who are homeless or at-risk for homelessness can get help from the VA Boston's Homeless Women Veterans Outreach and Case Management Program.

### **Your Local Veterans' Agent**

The best place for you to go for help with other questions is to your local Veterans' Agent, who works out of your local City or Town Hall. The Veterans' Agent's job is to help veterans learn about, apply for, and in some cases, receive benefits. Veterans' Agents are knowledgeable about an array of federal, state, and local benefits to which you may be entitled. Your Agent can help you fill out application forms for the benefits listed in this booklet.

Visit the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services website <http://www.mass.gov/veterans/benefits-and-services> for contact information and benefits assistance.

## **Other Massachusetts State Veteran Benefits**

### **Motor Vehicles Benefits**

Veteran series license plates, excise tax exemptions, and vehicle registration exemptions are benefits offered to veterans in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Disabled veterans who by reason of service in the U.S. armed forces have suffered the loss of, or permanent loss of, the use of one or both hands or feet, or who have permanent impairment of vision in both eyes, or any other disability or handicap of such veterans that may be determined by the Medical Affairs Branch of the Registry of Motor Vehicles are eligible to receive, free of charge, disabled veterans motor vehicle registration plates and are exempt from the biannual registration renewal fee.

All veterans of any war or military action who, in the course of duty, have been captured and incarcerated by an enemy of the U.S. during an armed conflict are eligible to receive, free of charge, ex-prisoner of war motor vehicle registration plates and are exempt from the biannual registration renewal fee. Presentation of satisfactory evidence of such prisoner of war status is required. A surviving spouse will be able to keep this plate until he/she remarries, or fails to renew or cancels such registration, but an annual fee would then be required.

### **National Guard & Reserve**

Tuition and Fee Waivers for Guard Members: Tuition and fee waiver for members of the Massachusetts National Guard at all state colleges and universities

The Massachusetts National Guard Education Assistance Program provides a 100% tuition and fee waiver for Massachusetts National Guard soldiers attending a state college, university, or community college program. Generally, these state-supported programs are offered during the day as part of a degree program. Your assistance can continue as long as you are in good standing academically and until you have reached 130 semester hours. Homefront Financial Security Loan Program: In March 2003, State Treasurer Timothy P. Cahill announced a low interest loan program for all resident reservists and Massachusetts National Guard members.

### **State Benefits for Dependents of a Veteran**

The Commonwealth provides a uniform program of financial and medical assistance for indigent veterans and their dependents. Qualifying veterans and their dependents receive necessary financial assistance for food, shelter, clothing, housing supplies, and medical care in accordance with a formula which takes into account the number of dependants and income from all sources. Eligible dependents of deceased veterans are provided with the same benefits as they would were the veteran still living

Visit the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services website <http://www.mass.gov/veterans/benefits-and-services> for contact information and benefits assistance.

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