



2026

MINNESOTA

LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) is pleased that again this year, the Legislature passed, and Governor Walz signed, the fifth annual Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill. For five years now, these bills have provided a historic investment in MDVA programs and services and reinforced that Minnesota Veterans are a priority. The Omnibus Bills are now a precedent and we expect them to continue for many years to come.

MDVA values the partnerships and collaboration we enjoy with many Veteran organizations. We thank them all for their advocacy – particularly in attending the annual Veterans Day on the Hill event in April and the outcome of this Omnibus Bill.

The bill combines the language from five individual Veterans and Military Affairs bills into one and was passed without any no votes for the first time. This avoids tying Veterans funding and policy items into partisan bills that can put the passage of important legislation at risk.

Here are the major Veterans-related components:



VETERANS OF THE SECRET WAR IN LAOS ★

The Veterans Omnibus Bill includes a continuation from the 2025 Legislative session to grant specific benefits to Veterans of the Secret War in Laos. Originally introduced as HF 3919 and SF 4075 by Rep. Ethan Cha and Sen. Susan Pha, the bill was written to enact the recommendations made by the Veterans of the Secret War in Laos Task Force. The bill codified the eligibility determination process and made adjustments to a few of the benefits, including allowing for a Special Guerrilla Unit (SGU) Veteran designation on Minnesota driver's licenses or state ID cards. Other benefits include:

- » Honor Guards from Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organizations (VSO) can be reimbursed by MDVA for providing services at the funeral of a deceased SGU Veteran.
- » Burial privileges at State Veterans Cemeteries if verified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) as eligible for burial.
- » Permanent grave markers purchased by MDVA and made available through County Veterans Service Offices or VSOs.
- » Veterans Preference providing Veteran job applicants a limited preference in hiring and promotion for public employment jobs. Permissive preference is available to non-public jobs.
- » Copies of vital records provided without charge to any Veteran, surviving spouse or next of kin.
- » Only SGU Veterans whose service has been verified and have received a Certificate of Eligibility from MDVA will be eligible for the benefits listed above.

CTF CODIFIED ★

The Commanders' Task Force (CTF) is made up of leaders from Minnesota's eight largest Congressionally Chartered Veterans Service Organizations (American Legion, AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Jewish War Veterans, Marine Corps League, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America and VFW). It has existed for decades as a key stakeholder for MDVA and Veterans issues at the State Capitol but did not have proper recognition in state law despite inclusion in last year's Veterans of the Secret War in Laos Task Force. Bill language was introduced by Chairs Rep. Matt Bliss and Sen. Aric Putnam as HF 4492/SF 4560 and later amended into SF 3955 for final passage.

LEGISLATIVELY DIRECTED GRANT STANDARDS ★

The Veterans and Military Affairs Omnibus Bill also includes a provision to create new standards for non-profits seeking legislatively directed grants issued by MDVA. Eligible grantees must have five years of experience, be in good standing with the Minnesota Attorney General's office and have a current 990 tax form on file with the IRS. Grant money may only be used to provide services to Minnesota Veterans or active service members and their immediate families. Immediate family members (Gold Star Families) of a service member who died in the line of duty are also eligible. The language also directs the agency to establish a grading system for competitive grant applicants and to use that system for awarding the size of grants. Grants may be suspended if fraud, inappropriate action or incapability is found. Grant recipients must report the use of grant funds to the MDVA Commissioner annually. The Commissioner will then share those reports with the Legislature.

STATE VETERANS CEMETERY ELIGIBILITY EXPANSION ★

The Veterans Omnibus Bill contains a section that will expand eligibility to State Veterans Cemeteries, located in Duluth, Little Falls, Preston and Redwood Falls. The expanded eligibility is for members of the National Guard or Reserve components who completed a full term of service and received an honorable discharge but did not serve overseas in a military conflict. Members who died while in good standing with the assigned component and whose death was not due to willful misconduct are also eligible. This expansion is also available to the spouses, minor children or unmarried adult children of those service members. The bill also adjusts the burial fee statute and expands the eligibility for Honor Guard services per diem for those fitting the expanded eligibility as well as Veterans of the Secret War in Laos.

TEMPORARY HOME CLOSURE CLARIFICATION ★

Another part of the Veterans Omnibus Bill is SF 3955 from Sen. Robert Kupec and Rep. Bidal Duran. This section of the bill updates statute to allow MDVA to temporarily close a Minnesota Veterans Home in the unlikely event a Home is tagged with an involuntary termination notice from surveyors. It is needed to comply with Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Minnesota Department of Health requirements. Without this legislation, MDVA was unable to close a Home without legislative authorization creating a conflict with federal requirements for a closure plan.

In addition to the successful passing of the Omnibus Bill, the Legislature also passed several standalone bills related to Veterans.

VETERANS EDUCATION PROGRAM STATUTE CLEANUP ★

The first Veterans bill passed by the 2026 Legislature was HF 3741 and was presented to the Governor as Chapter 49. The language modernizes references for Veterans Higher Education Programs that exist in MDVA's section of statutes. This has been accomplished through the consolidation of a seldom used State Soldiers Assistance Program Education Benefit that was superseded by both the post-9/11 GI Bill and the Minnesota GI Bill. It does keep in place the surviving spouse and dependent benefits. The bill also includes technical and administrative updates. Finally, it ensures all Veterans education benefits and appropriation authority is moved to the Veterans Education and Occupational Resources office in MDVA. This will allow for standardized eligibility criteria, stipend amounts and program requirements.

HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMAS FOR VETERANS ★

Other legislation established a standardized statewide process for awarding high school diplomas to Veterans of the Korean Conflict and Vietnam War who left high school early due to the draft or military enlistment. If eligible, a Veteran can request a high school diploma from a Minnesota school district or charter school. Family members can also make the request on behalf of a deceased Veteran. MDVA and County Veterans Service Officers will be available to assist school districts and charter schools to fulfill these requests, including verification of DD-214s. This provision originated from Sen. Jordan Rasmusson's SF 3603 and was later passed into a larger education policy bill, HF 4492.

ORGANIZATION COLLABORATION ★

HF 3467 authored by Rep. Kari Rehrauer and Sen. Heather Gustafson was passed into law unanimously as Chapter 52. It amends Minnesota Statute 196.22 to create clear authority for MDVA to partner with organizations that serve Veterans. This will allow for non-monetary agency resources to assist in initiatives relating to food insecurity, homelessness and suicide prevention. These organizations fill gaps for Veterans where government programs and benefits are unable to assist.

MDVA STATUTE CLEANUP AND MODERNIZATION ★

HF 3544 authored by Rep. Aaron Repinski and Sen. Kupec passed unanimously and contained the following provisions:

- » **Deputy Commissioner for Administration.** This bill reclassifies the agency Chief of Staff position. Following enactment, the position will now be referred to as the Deputy Commissioner for Administration and maintains the requirement that this position is filled by a Veteran and Minnesota resident.
- » **Align State Benefit Forfeiture with Federal Benefit Forfeiture**
HF 3544 also includes a section to align state benefit forfeiture with federal benefits under U.S. Code 38, Chapter 61 (forfeiture for fraud, treason and other subversive activities). This ensures that MDVA funds and programs go toward eligible individuals and create a more consistent and fair distribution of fiscal resources.
- » **Repeal of Outdated Sections of Statute**
Chapter 50 also repeals two outdated sections of law. The first is the Environmental Hazards Information and Assistance Act that passed in the 1980s. This section of law became obsolete due to Federal legislative changes that now recognize chemical agent impact on service members, and many illnesses are now acknowledged as presumptive conditions by the VA. The second repeals a law that required MDVA to collect and maintain data about Minnesotans who died from service-connected causes. This has not been viable due to the Department of Defense not allowing the sharing of this information.

CAPITAL INVESTMENT BILL ★

The Capital Investment Bill, also known as the bonding bill, is always one of the last bills passed by the Legislature each year due to end-of-session negotiations. This year was no different. Chapter 130 was the second to last bill passed before the Legislature's constitutional deadline of May 18. It borrows money to fund infrastructure needs throughout the state. For MDVA, it includes \$15 million for asset preservation, the highest allocation MDVA has received in a bonding bill. This money will be used to repair and update buildings at the State Veterans Homes and State Veterans Cemeteries.

The bill also authorizes MDVA to redesignate State funds that were originally meant to rebuild Minnesota Veterans Homes - Hastings because a federal funding match was unlikely. Now MDVA will use \$45.2 million to renovate and rehabilitate the Hastings Home and \$17.2 million for Building 16 on the Minneapolis Veterans Home campus. Both Building 16 and Hastings are home to the MDVA Domiciliary program.

SUICIDE PREVENTION REPORT

In 2025, the Legislature directed MDVA to create a comprehensive Veteran Suicide Prevention Plan with a report due in February 2026. The department presented this plan to the Veterans Affairs Committees in both the House and Senate early in session.

The Suicide Prevention Plan builds on work that began in 2019 when MDVA first sought legislative support to address Veteran suicide. Initial efforts included participation in the "Governor's Challenge" to eliminate death by suicide, a collaborative effort with the VA and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

Since then, MDVA has expanded partnerships with multiple organizations providing mental health and suicide prevention services and distributed thousands of gunlocks to reduce access to lethal means. In addition, those partnerships helped deliver training programs including Mental Health First Aid and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training.

The updated plan establishes a coordinated statewide strategy focused on prevention, intervention, crisis response and postvention for Veterans and their families. It aligns with both the Minnesota State Suicide Prevention Plan and the national VA prevention framework, ensuring consistency with state and federal priorities.

The plan provides a roadmap for policy development, partnerships and resource coordination across state, local, Tribal, federal and community organizations serving Veterans. It emphasizes collaboration, equity, system integration and data-driven decision-making.

Key priorities include improving service coordination, expanding access to culturally responsive care, strengthening protective factors and social connection, improving early identification of suicide risk and enhancing support for families and communities affected by suicide. Progress will be measured through continuous evaluation to ensure accountability and responsiveness to Veteran needs.

If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, call 988 and then press 1, or text 838255 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.



To read the full Veteran Suicide Prevention Plan, visit MinnesotaVeteran.org or scan this QR code.

MDVA PROGRAMS & SERVICES

MDVA is dedicated to helping Veterans from all eras and their families gain access to the benefits and resources they have earned with programs that include:

- Adult Day Care
- Counseling
- Dental Care Assistance
- Education Support
- Emergency Assistance
- Financial Assistance/Grants
- Health and Disability Claims and Appeals for VA and Social Security Benefits
- Homelessness Prevention and Support
- Optical Care Assistance
- State Veterans Cemeteries
- State Veterans Homes/Skilled Nursing and Domiciliary Care
- Suicide Prevention
- Veteran Family Assistance
- Women Veteran Support

For information on all of the programs and benefits available to you, contact:



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of Veterans Affairs**

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MDVA offers support seven days a week:



1-888-LinkVet (1-888-546-5838)
TTY: 1-800-627-3529
Email or Live Chat: LinkVet.org

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