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VALLEE CO-SPONSORS BILL TO PROMOTE VETERANS BENEFITS

Boston, Mass. – Representative James E. Vallee (*D – Franklin*) has co-sponsored legislation to help the Commonwealth of Massachusetts locate and notify veterans who qualify for benefits under the Welcome Home Act.

Less than half of qualifying veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom have received benefits available to them, according to testimony heard recently by the Legislature’s Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs. It is difficult to maintain communication with the veterans upon their return, as the contact information provided from the Department of Defense (DOD) quickly becomes obsolete because veterans change residences, take new jobs, or continue their education elsewhere.

The bill was filed by Sen. Scott Brown (R-Wrentham), Rep. Anthony Verga (D-Gloucester) and Sen. Stephen Brewer (D-Barre), co-chairs of the Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs, and co-sponsored by Vallee, Assistant Vice-Chairman of the House Committee on Ways and Means and a Lt. Colonel in the Army National Guard.

This bill will establish a check-off box on State Resident/Part Time Resident tax forms and ask all veterans of Enduring Freedom/Iraqi Freedom to indicate their participation.

Upon the receipt of all tax forms, the Department of Revenue (DOR) will share that information with the Department of Veterans Services (DVS) in order to initiate the outreach process. With the updated addresses, the Office of Veteran’s Services will be able to contact those veterans who qualify but have not taken advantage of this valuable benefit. There are no new costs associated with this legislation; in fact it would likely save money in future mailing costs.

The bill would provide benefits of **\$500.00** for six months or more of active service, state side or outside the continental limits of the United States, and **\$1000.00** for active service in Afghanistan or Iraq. These benefits will be administered by the Office of the State Treasurer and eligibility requirements are available at the following website:

<http://www.mass.gov/treasury/veteransbonus/welcomehomebonus.htm>

“This legislation represents a great move forward in helping our veterans who have so courageously served us,” said Vallee. “I will surely work hard with my colleagues to see this necessary bill through the legislative process.”

“Our veterans have given so much for our country, and we need to do all we can to make sure they get all the benefits currently available to them,” said Brown. “We have worked with the DVS and DOR to make sure this legislation will help us address this problem.”

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