



# DAN DEASY

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

## REPORT TO THE PEOPLE

DEMOCRATIC CHAIRMAN, HOUSE LIQUOR CONTROL COMMITTEE

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Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. • By appointment.

### SPECIAL COURTS PROVIDE A SECOND CHANCE FOR VETERANS CHARGED WITH NONVIOLENT CRIMES

Pennsylvania has one of the largest veteran populations in the country, with at least 800,000 former service members calling the commonwealth home. Although we prefer to think of our veterans as enjoying the well-deserved benefits that go along with living in freedom and peace, the harsh reality is sometimes very different.

Unfortunately, many veterans return to civilian life suffering from post-traumatic stress injuries, traumatic brain injuries, or other service-related problems that can lead to homelessness, addiction and criminal activity.

Some veterans who end up in the criminal justice system, fortunately and rightly, have an alternative to sentencing: participation in a veterans' treatment court.

Modeled after drug courts, these special problem-solving courts provide treatment and support – rather than punishment – to veterans who are charged with nonviolent crimes and are struggling with addiction or mental health problems.

Instead of being sentenced, veterans receive counseling, treatment for their addictions or illnesses, educational assistance, and health care support. To ensure that they comply with program requirements, they are closely supervised by specialized probation officers and required to make regular court visits.

I commend Pennsylvania's veterans' treatment courts and honor the work helping those who served to protect our freedom. Much work remains, however, because many counties still do not have these courts. To that end, I'm supporting legislation that would install a specialized veterans' court in any Pennsylvania county that does not have one.

I'm also supporting HB 691, which would permit veterans who are diagnosed with post-traumatic stress injuries or a traumatic brain injury after they have been imprisoned to apply to a court for relief by arguing that their diagnosis was a mitigating factor in their crime. Considering how much our veterans have sacrificed on our behalf, they should receive a second chance and the promise of rehabilitation.

### THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

DEAR VETERAN,

First and foremost, I want to thank you for your service to our country. You answered the call of duty and put your life on the line to protect us – and too often that service is taken for granted. As your state representative, I am advocating for you in Harrisburg, and I hope this newsletter is informative of issues that may impact you as a veteran. Please call my office at any time if you need assistance with any issue – big or small.

Thank you!



**IN MEMORY** – remembering my longtime friend Joe Quaquareucci who recently passed away. Joe was a WWII veteran and a United States Navy Seabee.

# VETERAN PROGRAMS

**It is important to me that our veterans receive the full benefit of all programs and services Pennsylvania provides. Here's a brief look at some available resources. Call my office if you want more details.**

**Amputee and Paralyzed Veteran Program:** Provides a \$150 per month pension to veterans who served honorably, were PA residents on entering the military, suffered a service-connected injury or disease resulting in loss – or lost use of – two or more extremities, and have at least a 40% disability rating in each limb.

A similar pension program exists for blind veterans. To learn more about both programs or to apply, call our local county Veterans' Office at 412-621-4357 or call my office for help with your application. Additionally, I am supporting legislation to increase the monthly benefit for both programs from \$150 to \$200. See page 4 for details on this and other bills that would help veterans.

**Educational Gratuity Program:** Provides financial aid of up to \$500 per semester for children of honorably discharged veterans who have service-connected disabilities and served during a period of war or armed conflict, or children of veterans who die or died in service during a period of war or armed conflict.

**Military Family Education Program:** Allows Pennsylvania National Guard members who re-enlist for an additional six years of service to earn five years of higher education benefits for their spouse or children.

**Veterans Crisis Line:** Free, confidential support is available for veterans who feel anxious, depressed or alone. Calling the crisis line at 1-800-273-8255 (and pressing 1) will put you in touch with a caring, qualified responder. Many responders are veterans themselves. The crisis line is available for all veterans, service members, National Guard, reservists, and family and friends.

**Veterans Registry:** The state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) provides an online registry to keep veterans and their families connected to state benefits, programs and services. It also allows veterans and family members to opt-in to receive news, updates and the department's weekly DMVA Digest. To learn more, visit [dmva.pa.gov](http://dmva.pa.gov) and click on the Veterans Registry link at the top of the page.

**Veterans Temporary Assistance:** This program can provide veterans or their beneficiaries temporary financial assistance for life necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. Applicants who meet eligibility requirements can receive up to \$1,600 over 12 months. To learn more, visit [dmva.pa.gov](http://dmva.pa.gov), click on "Veterans Affairs" at the top of the page, and scroll down to Programs/Services. To apply, call our local county Veterans' Office at 412-621-4357. My office can also help you with your application.

**Veterans Resource Online Directory:** This directory provides a comprehensive listing of resources – from business and finance to veterans' health and vital records – all in one place. Visit [dmva.pa.gov](http://dmva.pa.gov), click on "Veterans Affairs" at the top, and scroll down to Programs/Services, where you will find "Veterans Resource Online Directory."



*Rep. Deasy with Sen. Wayne Fontana and Commander Don Scholz of the American Legion Post 496 in Sheraden.*

## VETERAN LICENSE PLATES

Specialty veterans' plates are a great way for family and friends to show support for our PA veterans, with \$15 from each plate sold benefiting the Veterans Trust Fund. For \$37, the "Honoring Our Veterans" plate is available for cars, motorcycles and trucks with a registered gross weight of no more than 14,000 pounds. A more recent addition – "Honoring Our Women Veterans" – costs \$36, and a portion of the sale proceeds goes to the Veterans Trust Fund to support programs and resources benefiting women veterans.

And of course, **for veterans and service members only**, there is a wide range of U.S. Military Registration Plates available for every branch of service special designations, as well as others.

To learn more about all these plates, call my office.

## DRIVER'S LICENSES

Family and friends of veterans: you can also show support when you apply for or renew your driver's license or photo ID by making a \$3 tax-deductible contribution to the Veterans Trust Fund. The additional \$3 is not part of the renewal fee printed on your renewal application, so you will need to add the donated amount to your payment.

**Veterans:** Remember that you can apply for a driver's license with a Veterans Designation at no extra cost. Call my office for details.

## DEASY CO-SPONSORS BILL TO EXEMPT SURVIVING MILITARY SPOUSES FROM PAYING PROPERTY TAXES

I commend members of our military for putting their lives on the line for our country. While they are overseas protecting us, I make it my personal duty as a state representative to take care of their families here at home.

I co-sponsored HB 1953, which proposes an amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution to extend the property tax exemption to Pennsylvania residents who are the

surviving spouse of a member of the U.S. Armed Forces who were killed in action or missing and presumed dead, or who received a disability rating of 100% by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and subsequently passed away.

The exemption would end if the surviving spouse remarries.

## SPOTLIGHT ON OUR LOCAL VETERANS



*Rep. Deasy with veterans Catherine Chesno, Gordon Mercer and Richard Sciuibba at a veteran recognition event at the West End Healthy Active Living Center.*



*Rep. Deasy with veteran David Seretti of Crafton.*



*Rep. Deasy with veterans Stephen Gezovich and Frank Cuspard at the Beechview Healthy Active Living Center.*

## MY OFFICE IS HERE TO HELP: OUTREACH FOR SENIORS AND VETERANS AVAILABLE MONTHLY

**For our seniors:** The state Department of Aging's APPRISE program has a new name: Pennsylvania Medicare Education and Decision Insight. PA MEDI is a health insurance assistance program that provides help with understanding Medicare and Medicaid eligibility benefits, Medicare prescription drug benefits and Medicare supplemental insurance. I am happy to facilitate meetings with a PA MEDI counselor in my district office to assist seniors with questions about healthcare-related programs. The PA MEDI counselor can help you with Medicare Part A and Part B enrollment, prescription drug plans, Medicare Advantage plans and other health insurance options. Call my office at 412-928-9514 to line up a meeting in my district office with a MEDI/Apprise counselor.

**For our veterans:** Congressman Mike Doyle and his team have been a tremendous resource and support to veterans in my district. His staff has been accessible to meet with residents here in my district office for many years. They are knowledgeable about pension benefits, survivor benefits and VA-related health care issues, as well as other veteran-related benefits to which you may be entitled. Please call my office to arrange an appointment to meet with Congressman Doyle's staff at my district office.

# LEGISLATION TO BENEFIT VETERANS

I support the following bills and others pending in the Pa. House of Representatives that could directly benefit veterans.

**HB 1752 – Free Medical Records for Homeless Veterans** – In Pennsylvania, thousands of homeless veterans struggle with war-related injuries or disabilities. To help those veterans apply for disability relief, I'm co-sponsoring HB 1752, which would offer veterans a single, free-of-charge medical record. This bill would streamline the process of applying for disability benefits for homeless veterans by providing medical records on a single sheet of paper for free, breaking down barriers of both cost and access.

**HB 1661 – Supporting Our Veterans Exiting Incarceration** – Veterans involved in the justice systems have unique and extensive medical, mental health, and substance use disorder treatment needs. However, when a veteran is incarcerated, they can lose some or all their benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Upon release, they can get some or all their earned benefits back. Unfortunately, very few incarcerated veterans know what to do to restore those benefits. I co-sponsored HB 1661, which would require that veterans incarcerated in a State Correctional Institution be given a "veterans benefits briefing" before they are released. The topics would include state and federal benefits available to the veteran and their family, as well as how to access and apply for them.

**HB 1633 – Clean Slate for Veterans** – Veterans who suffer from an undiagnosed mental health disorder or traumatic brain injury may find it difficult re-adjusting to civilian life, and as a result may commit crimes that stain their records. To help alleviate these difficulties, I am co-sponsoring HB 1633, which would establish Clean Slate for Veterans, building upon the current Clean Slate Law. This bill would provide limited access to the criminal records of veterans with undiagnosed mental health disorders or traumatic brain injuries after certifying with a medical professional. With this bill, we hope to smooth the return to civilian life for veterans whose unseen disabilities might otherwise cause difficulty in the transition.

**HB 1631 – Increasing Access to Driver's Licenses & ID Cards for Individuals Living with Disabilities** – During the pandemic, legislation was passed to allow people with disabilities and health risks to renew their driver's licenses and identification cards by using a previous color photo and signature. I am co-sponsoring HB 1631, which would make those changes permanent for people with certain disabilities and chronic conditions such as blindness, lung disease,

limited mobility issues, and cardiac disease. This would also include people eligible for disabled veterans' plates and placards.

**HB 1389 – Strengthening the Veterans' Trust Fund** – The pandemic has economically impacted veterans' service organizations, nonprofits, and local governments that provide important programs and services to Pennsylvania's veterans, who suffer from high rates of mental health conditions, substance abuse and homelessness. Pennsylvania's Veterans' Trust Fund (VTF) provides grants to charitable organizations, veterans' service organizations and county directors of veterans affairs to support veterans and their families. I have co-sponsored HB 1389, which would appropriate \$1,000,000 to the VTF from money the state receives from the American Rescue Plan to fund more projects and help more veterans.

**HB 1220 – Veterans' Pension Program Increase** – The Blind Veterans Pension Program and Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program are two essential programs in many disabled veterans' lives. However, neither program has had its pension of \$150 per month increased since 1999. I am co-sponsoring HB 1220, which would increase each of these pensions by \$50 to \$200. This modest increase is the least we can do for the veterans who have sacrificed so much for our safety at home.

**HB 910 – Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption Legislation** – While current legislation allows for veterans with disabilities because of wartime service to receive an exemption from personal property taxes, this exemption is not extended to all veterans facing disabilities related to service. I have co-sponsored HB 910, which would extend this exemption to all 100% disabled veterans with service-related injuries, whether incurred during wartime or not.

**HB 839 – "Green Alert" System for At-Risk Missing Veterans** – After serving our nation and defending freedom around the world, it's unfortunate that many veterans return home with mental illnesses or trauma stemming from service. This may place many veterans in an "at-risk" position of harming themselves. Therefore, I am co-sponsoring HB 839, which would create a "Green Alert" system, similar to "Amber Alerts." The Green Alert system would display a message either via text or on electronic traffic signs to notify the public when a veteran with mental health conditions has gone missing, increasing the chance for a safe return home for missing veterans.

**HB 826 – Reduced Fee for Identification Cards** – Identification cards have become an essential item in everyday life for most individuals, but many people put off applying for an identification card because they cannot afford the fees. I have co-sponsored HB 826, which would reduce the fee for identification cards for individuals who are homeless, low-income, disabled, and veterans. This fee reduction will make enrolling in college, getting a job, and applying for assistance much more accessible, as they all require a form of personal identification.

## DEASY PROPOSES COMBAT TO COLLEGE BILL

**HB 560 – Combat to College Program** – Veterans returning from service deserve the chance to easily transition into higher-education programs without financial concerns or trouble adapting to the college environment. For this reason, I've introduced HB 560, the Combat to College Program. The bill would amend Title 51 and introduce a veteran-friendly education environment and programs to help veterans and returning deployed military in their pursuit of a higher-education degree at state institutions (PASSHE, state-related universities, and community colleges). Some key aspects of the program include ease of access to financial aid, class registration, disabled veteran accommodations and academic counseling. This would also require state institutions to provide post-secondary credit to veterans from their military training, the introduction of a coordinator of veteran-friendly events to these institutions and the change of student's designation from "withdrawal" to "mobilized" if a student is called to active duty.



Rep. Deasy discussing veterans issues at one of his job fairs.

*"Our flag does not fly because the wind moves it...  
it flies with the last breath of each soldier who died protecting it."  
– Unknown*