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**LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM REVIEW AND  
INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE**

September 14, 2015

**Informational Public Hearing Notice  
For Current PRI Study**

**Office of Advocacy and Assistance within the Department of Veterans'  
Affairs**

As part of its ongoing study of the Office of Advocacy and Assistance within the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (PRI) is holding an informational public hearing on the topic on **Wednesday, September 30, 2015, beginning at 2:30 p.m. in Room 2D LOB** (along with one other study topic, on regional cooperation between local boards of education).

**Study Focus**

Examine how well the Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OAA) provides "aid and benefit" to veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents and family members, as required by state statute.

The purpose of the hearing is to provide a forum for public input on the study topic, which is further explained in the attached study scope. The public hearing sign-up will begin at 1:30 p.m. in the Second Floor Atrium of the LOB. If able, please submit 30 copies of written testimony to committee staff by 2:00 p.m. in the Second Floor Atrium of the LOB.

The first hour of the hearing is reserved for legislators, constitutional officers, state agency heads, and chief elected municipal elected officials. The testimony of the members of the public will be limited to three (3) minutes. Please see the following page for more details regarding the public hearing.

For your information, earlier at 1:00 p.m., PRI staff will provide brief interim study updates to the committee on both studies, which will highlight pertinent information.

The material will be posted on the PRI office website at [https://www.cga.ct.gov/pri/2015\\_OAA.asp](https://www.cga.ct.gov/pri/2015_OAA.asp) on Tuesday, September 29 in the morning, the day before the PRI public hearing.

Please do not hesitate to contact the PRI staff office at 860-240-0300 if you have any questions or concerns related to this PRI study.

**Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee**  
**September 30, 2015**

**The Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee** will hold an informational public hearing on **Wednesday, September 30, 2015 at 2:30 p.m. in Room 2D of the LOB** on the following studies:

- Regional Cooperation Between Local Boards of Education
- Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance

The public hearing sign-up will begin at 1:30 P.M. in the Second Floor Atrium of the LOB. Please submit 30 copies of written testimony to Committee staff by 2:00 p.m. in the Second Floor Atrium of the LOB. If you wish to submit testimony electronically, please email written testimony in Word or PDF format to [PRItestimony@cga.ct.gov](mailto:PRItestimony@cga.ct.gov).

The first hour of the hearing is reserved for Legislators, Constitutional Officers, State Agency Heads and Chief Elected Municipal Officials. Public speakers will be limited to three minutes of testimony. The Committee encourages witnesses to submit a written statement and to condense oral testimony to a summary of that statement. Unofficial sign-up sheets have no standing with the Committee. All public hearing testimony, written and spoken, is public information. As such, it will be made available on the CGA website and indexed by internet search engines.

**SECURITY PRECAUTIONS**

The State Capitol Police request the cooperation of all individuals regarding security in the Capitol and LOB. Please do not leave briefcases or other items unattended. In addition, please do not use papers, briefcases, etc. to reserve a space in the lines for public hearing signups. Abandoned items are subject to search and may be seized by the Capitol Police. All staff and lobbyists are reminded to wear their identification or lobbyist badges.

**VISITOR PARKING**

Capitol Police direct visitors to the first floor of the Legislative Office Garage. When this area fills, visitors are directed to other available areas of the parking garage. Once all public parking is at capacity, additional visitors are provided with a map to the Forest Street lot and a list of shuttle times.

Directions to the Forest Street Lot from the Parking Garage: Coming from the garage entrances, go straight to the light after the stop sign. Turn right onto Capitol Avenue. Go 9 traffic lights and turn right onto Forest Street, (Note: First right after crossing under the railroad bridge is Forest Street.) The Parking lot is the first driveway on the left. Lot C, State of Connecticut, DPW is marked with a blue sign.

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

The public entrances are located on the west side of both buildings. Members of the public will be required to walk through a metal detector and have all property scanned through a package scanner. Anyone who does not possess a CGA issued ID/Access card is considered a member of the public.

# Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee

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John W. Fonfara, *Co-Chair*  
John A. Kissel  
Eric D. Coleman  
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Joe Markley  
Andrew Maynard

## Connecticut General Assembly

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**House Members**  
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Mary M. Mushinsky  
Whit Betts  
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Philip Miller  
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## STUDY SCOPE

### Department of Veterans' Affairs: Office of Advocacy and Assistance

#### Focus

This study will examine how well the Department of Veterans' Affairs Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OAA) provides "aid and benefit" to veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents and family members, as required by state statute.

#### Background

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance assists veterans and their eligible family members in obtaining government veteran benefits. Federal law requires anyone – including those employed at OAA – helping veterans get federal benefits to be a Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) accredited by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Veterans' Service Officers within OAA are responsible for informing veterans and family members about the benefits and services for which they may be eligible, and conducting the following activities:

- assisting in the establishment, preparation and presentation of claims pursuant to rights, benefits or privileges accruing to veterans;
- collecting and preparing data relating to benefits and services for veterans, their spouses, and eligible dependents;
- canvassing nursing homes to determine if veterans and/or spouses are due benefits;
- cooperating with service organizations in disseminating information;
- counseling veterans concerning educational training, health, medical, rehabilitation, housing facilities and services, and employment services; and
- representing veterans before the federal VA concerning claims and benefits.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to its assistance and advocacy responsibilities, OAA is required to annually train veterans' service contact persons at the municipal level.<sup>2</sup> The office also: 1) handles the administrative functions for burial in the state's veterans' cemeteries; 2) maintains the State Veterans' Registry (an electronic database of military discharges); 3) manages the Connecticut

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs, <http://www.ct.gov/ctva/cwp/view.asp?a=2014&q=290856&ctvaNav> (accessed April 7, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Any municipality that does not have its own local veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other municipalities, and does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' services officer, must designate a city or town employee to serve as a veterans' service contact person.

Wartime Medal and Registry program; and 4) ensures veterans' eligibility under the state's Veteran Flag Identifier program used for driver's licenses.

State law requires the Office of Advocacy and Assistance to have a staff of not less than eight, including six VSOs. All VSOs must be veterans, with at least one who is a woman responsible for addressing the concerns of women veterans, and at least two who are proficient in English and Spanish. A central OAA office is located on the Veterans' Home campus in Rocky Hill, with regional offices located in each of the state's five congressional districts. In FY 14, OAA had 15 staff and an operating budget of \$936,000.

## **Areas of Analysis**

1. Describe the Office of Advocacy and Assistance, including its purpose, organization, functions, responsibilities, and processes to help veterans.
2. Catalogue OAA activities, including the: number of assistance applications received; type of assistance sought, by whom, and for whom; number of applications accepted and denied, and the reasons for denials; number and type of advocacy efforts; and other responsibilities completed by the office.
3. Evaluate OAA's outcomes in assisting accepted applicants, advocating for veterans and their family members, and performing other activities required of the office.
4. Examine whether OAA (and/or the department) evaluates its performance, what measures are used, and if the measures are adequate.
5. Assess OAA's staff workload, resources, and qualifications.
6. Determine whether OAA has a proper outreach plan to inform veterans of available benefits and services, and identify veterans in need of assistance.
7. Gauge veterans' overall satisfaction with services received from OAA.
8. Examine OAA's collaboration and coordination with the federal VA, state agencies, municipalities, and other veterans' service organizations to assist and advocate for veterans.
9. Identify the level and type of input and guidance OAA receives from the state veterans' affairs department's Board of Trustees.

## **Areas Not Under Review**

This study will not re-examine any areas included in the program review committee's 2014 study of the Connecticut State Veterans' Home.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRI Staff Contact</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jennifer Proto: <a href="mailto:jennifer.proto@cga.ct.gov">jennifer.proto@cga.ct.gov</a> Brian Beisel: <a href="mailto:brian.beisel@cga.ct.gov">brian.beisel@cga.ct.gov</a></p>
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