

# **Gov. Pritzker Signs Seven Pieces of Legislation Further Honoring and Protecting Illinois Service Members**

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PRINGFIELD – Joined by legislators, advocates, and Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs (IDVA) Acting Director Terry Prince, Governor JB Pritzker today signed seven pieces of legislation that aim to improve the lives of Illinois’ service members and veterans and honor their service to their state and nation. The legislation package builds on steps already taken by the Pritzker administration on behalf of veterans and service

members including fully funding a fifth veteran's home in Chicago and the creation of the Veterans Service-Related Ailments Task Force to review injuries that are not currently recognized at the federal level.

"Our military men and women, our veterans, and their families deserve our full support," said Governor JB Pritzker. "I am proud to improve our service to our active military members, veterans, and their families by signing seven bills that address overlooked challenges they face during and after their service. Because one truth will always persist: it is our responsibility to serve our heroes as they have served us. Today, we have taken seven more steps to live up to their legacy."

"This legislation package enhances our ability to provide Illinois' veterans services more effectively, efficiently, and fairly while also honoring their service," said Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs Acting Director Terry Prince. "Individually, each bill is integral to improving processes and protecting the state's 650,000 veterans as they seek deserved benefits. Collectively, they reflect the Governor's and IDVA's commitment to amplify services and empower veterans, service members, and their families to thrive in Illinois."

## **House Bill 1290**

HB 1290 expands the state definition of honorable discharge to include veterans who were discharged due to sexuality or gender identity. Under the now defunct federal Don't Ask Don't Tell policy, gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans were prohibited from serving in the armed forces. According to military data, over 13,000 enlisted members of the LGBTQ community were discharged while the policy was in effect.

The new legislation opens the door for impacted veterans to upgrade their service records to an honorable status under state law, entitling them to benefits like medical care and a military burial. Service members who received a bad conduct discharge or were dishonorably discharged due to reasons other than their sexuality or gender identity are not impacted by HB 1290.

"It has been a decade since 'don't ask, don't tell' was repealed, but LGBTQ veterans who served honorably continue to be denied benefits and services solely because of their sexual orientation or gender identity," said State Representative Dave Vella (D – Loves Park). "Today Illinois stands proudly with these veterans, rejects this outdated and discriminatory policy, and restores the state benefits they have earned with our gratitude."

“As someone from a military family, I hold near to my heart values of service and patriotism. Countless LGBTQ people who also shared those values sought to serve America as part of her armed forces. Yet, decades of discriminatory policies betrayed their service,” said Brian C. Johnson, CEO of Equality Illinois, the state’s LGBTQ civil rights organization. “HB 1290 is an important step to restoring honor for those patriotic LGBTQ Illinoisans. Thank you to Gov. Pritzker, Rep. Mason, and Sen. Cullerton for your support of our LGBTQ veterans with this new law. We are grateful for their service and sacrifice.”

HB 1290 is effective January 1, 2022.

## **House Bill 2776**

HB 2776 requires the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR) to expedite professional license applications submitted by service members or their spouses within thirty days of receiving all required documentation. This updated process will help ease the transition process when a service family relocates as members and their spouses frequently hold licenses for professions including nursing, pharmacy, and dentistry.

The newly signed law also updates state statute regarding licensure requirements. Going forward, applications for licensure must include proof that the applicant meets the requirements and standards for the occupation or profession they’re applying for.

“Those who serve in the armed forces – and their spouses – make countless sacrifices in helping provide safety and security for our country. The last thing they should be worried about is when they can get to work in Illinois in their chosen professions,” said Mario Treto, Jr., Acting Secretary of the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation. “We are prepared to provide shorter wait times between application submission and review for our country’s bravest, while also ensuring the requirements for licensure are still met.”

IDFPR employs a military liaison who works directly with military service members and their spouses to provide them with tailored guidance when applying for professional licensure. The liaison may be contacted at [FPR.MilitaryLicense@illinois.gov](mailto:FPR.MilitaryLicense@illinois.gov). Additional resources can be found on the [IDFPR website](#).

“Service members and their spouses often rely on professional licenses faster for their jobs. They deserve to get them more quickly,” said State Senator Christopher Belt (D-Swansea). “The service members and families at Scott Airforce Base, which I represent,

often move here from other states. The lengthy delays they and their spouses face when waiting for professional licenses will now be cut in half.”

“This legislation breaks down barriers for active duty service members and their spouses by establishing a pathway to professional licensure in Illinois if an individual has received equivalent licensing in another state,” said State Representative LaToya Greenwood (D - East St. Louis).

HB 2776 is effective January 1, 2022.

### **House Bill 3865**

HB 3865 establishes additional consumer protections to protect service members and veterans. Championed by the Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Illinois Attorney General’s Office, the new law requires private companies that advertise veterans’ and service members’ benefits appeal services to publicly disclose the same services are available free of charge through county veterans’ services officers and other governmental agencies.

“As a proud Marine veteran and the Chair of Veterans Affairs, I fully support these efforts to improve the lives of Veterans, National Guard members, and their families,” said State Representative Stephanie Kifowit (D – Aurora). “The signing of these pieces of legislation shows not only the dedication of their sponsors, but of the general assembly in making Illinois a leader in supporting our nations heroes.”

HB 3865 is effective January 1, 2022.

### **Senate Bill 505**

SB 505 amends the military code, allowing family members or next of kin to be presented with a state flag in the event a member of the Illinois National Guard dies while on state active duty or in training status under the authority of the Governor.

“The National Guard has a unique dual-mission serving both under the State of Illinois as well as the United States of America,” said Maj. Gen. Rich Neely, the Adjutant General of Illinois and Commander of the Illinois National Guard. “Many of the dangers our Illinois National Guard service members face are under the authority of the Governor and under the banner of the State of Illinois. It is fitting that a National Guard member killed in the line of duty be appropriately honored by the State of Illinois.”

The Illinois National Guard has served both in Illinois and out of state under the Governor's authority including responses to COVID-19, floods, wildfires, hurricanes and other incidents. In addition, much of the Guard's military training is conducted under the Governor's authority.

"The selfless men and women of the Illinois National Guard have been front and center to protect us whenever we needed them, most recently during the pandemic," said State Representative Joyce Mason (D – Gurnee). "This bill makes sure that whenever one of our National Guard troops passes, their loved ones know that every citizen of the state appreciates their service by presenting them with an Illinois State flag."

SB 505 is effective January 1, 2022.

### **Senate Bill 2089**

SB 2089 requires the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to fly a United States flag, an Illinois Flag, and a Prisoner of War/Missing in Action flag at all State parks within five years. To help cover costs related to the initiative, groups and individuals can make donations to the Department's Special Projects Fund.

"When we visit and immerse ourselves in the beauty and wonder of our state parks it's important for us to take some time and remember why we have this privilege," said State Representative LaToya Greenwood (D - East St. Louis). "By flying POW/MIA flags along with our country's flag at all state parks, we are making a small but notable gesture to remember those who gave themselves so that we may enjoy the freedoms we have."

SB 2089 is effective January 1, 2022.

### **House Bill 1915**

HB 1915 allows the IDVA to create Fold of Honor decals for Illinois license plates. Drivers interested in receiving a Fold of Honor decal will be required to pay a first-time issuance cost of \$25, \$10 of which will go to the Folds of Honor Foundation Fund and the remaining \$15 will go to the Secretary of State Special License Plate Fund.

Money collected by the Folds of Honor Foundation Fund through the sale of the decals will fund educational scholarship grants for military families.

HB 1915 is effective immediately.

## **House Bill 2894**

HB 2894 designates the first Saturday in May as Veterans Gardening Day. The day will be used to honor and commemorate Illinois veterans.

HB 2894 is effective January 1, 2022.