

Testimony from John Brenner, Chairman Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission and Kit Watson, Secretary Pennsylvania War Veterans Council.

7 March 2012

Chairman Barrar, Chairman Sainato and Committee members

My name is John A. Brenner, Chairman of the State Veterans Commission and with me is Kit Watson, Secretary of the PA. Veterans War Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee

Please let me preface our remarks with making you aware that our testimony here today is from representatives of the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council and The Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission. While each have our individual views on these bills we have not yet had adequate time to present these bills and their ramifications to either the council or the commission for their full support. We did however support HB378 introduced by Ron Marsico, requiring one member of the state civil service commission to be a veteran of the armed forces. General John Stevens is a great choice and we look forward to his leadership and know that he will ensure veterans get a fair chance in competitive selection.

First, our Organizations applaud Auditor General Jack Wagners' report of 2008 for bringing the Veterans Preference issue into the forefront showing that twenty-five state agencies filled at least 569 Civil Service employment positions without consideration of eligible veterans and their veterans preference status. We also salute the Department of Military & Veterans Affairs, specifically General Michael Gould and the Adjutant General for ensuring veterans receive specific preference in their hiring practices. We also want to thank Representative Steven Barrar for introducing HB 1092, which would create an "Office of Veterans Advocate" in the Attorney General's office. It is a positive step in addressing our veteran's employment needs and to have an avenue where problems and issues dealt with at this level will be a huge benefit to our veteran's population.

House Bill 1092 outlines the Powers and Duties of 'The Veterans Advocate'. We believe this to be a great tool outlining the scope of duties and create a strong

authority to address those issues. Our hope is that this position will offer the veteran a non-partisan advocate dedicated to the interest of veterans concerning employment issues.

As to HB 1152 - we agree with the changes as called for regarding Title 51, in addressing that the term "Soldier" would be changed to read "Veteran".

We have also reviewed the following bills that have not yet been assigned to your committee but we suspect they will be soon.

HB 1090 would further strengthen the Civil Service Act. We feel there needs to be more time allotted for us, the veterans community - to review this bill in its' entirety to make sure we consider the full scope of these proposed changes to the law.

HB 985 requiring Veterans Preference notification be posted on the Civil Service Commissions web site, on all Civil Service Commission announcements, advertisements, and all exam materials and the proposal requiring notification that State law requires an additional 10 points be added to the veterans final exam score is a bill we believe would be fully supported by the veterans' community.

HB 1262 designs a clear path for appealing decisions made by the Civil Service Commission. While much of this bill seems adequate to address the appeals process we feel it would be unnecessary if HB 1092 is passed and enacted. While HB 1262 does not duplicate HB 1092 we feel HB 1092 is the best solution overall and we believe it would be readily accepted by the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council, the State Veterans Commission and the veterans of our Commonwealth.

In summary, veterans in this Commonwealth have sacrificed much to ensure we enjoy the freedom and liberty to come before this body and share our opinions today. These heroes, who have given so much in sweat, blood and devotion to duty, deserve every recognition and head start that we can offer them. Veterans make great employees and someone who has placed their life in jeopardy deserves every opportunity possible as they transition back to civilian life. We thank you for ensuring veterans receive such recognition.