

# Retirement and Survivor Benefit Pay Tax Exemption

## Civilian Public Safety

- H.43 – Military Retirement/Benefit Pay Exemption
  - Has been introduced numerous times but there has been hesitation due to the issue of adding or excluding various occupational groups to the benefit
  - White Paper on comparison of Civilian Public Safety vs. Military was drafted and presented which has a tremendous amount of bias and not fully factual
  - Giving military a tax break and ignoring public safety personnel is “an insult” to all of those who put their lives on the line to protect and serve the public everyday they go to work
- While the paper states that our missions may differ, the fact is that the danger, sacrifices, loyalty of our members and commitment are the same
  - We both are tasked with protecting the citizens of this country: The military is focused on external threats while public safety is tasked with internal threats.
  - Public Safety personnel also face also face threats of budget cuts and layoffs which affect safety, operations and delivery of services. Yet with these challenges, if you call 911 we still respond.
- Our members do take an oath to uphold and enforce the Constitution and Laws of the U.S. and the State of Vermont, along with the rules and ordinances of our respective municipality. We are sworn to “protect and serve”.
- It is important to understand that military service, much like public safety, is voluntary, and those who choose to join the military or go into public safety, do so willingly, under their own accord.
- While approximately 10-15% of military personnel will see combat, public safety personnel are faced with danger every time they are requested to respond to an emergency
  - Fire, extreme weather conditions, vehicle crashes, technical rescue (heights, confined space, collapse, water, and trench, etc.), hostile individuals, unsafe scenes, active shooter incidents, plus numerous other dangerous situations.
  - In comparison, 95% or more of public safety members face dangerous, potentially life ending situations every day that they work.
  - It was public safety responders who were first on the scene at the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, the events of 9-11, January 6, Tropical Storm Irene and the recent flooding Vermont has experienced the past 2-3 years, COVID-19 and the list goes on.
    - All of these events put our members in great harm and some even lost their lives, all while protecting our citizens

- The paper further states that military personnel are held to a higher standard which is grossly incorrect. Public Safety personnel are held to a very high standard and are viewed as role models within the community.
- Public Safety personnel have very similar, and in some instances higher levels of certain injuries and diseases. We see a high number of PTSD and behavioral health issues, cancers, cardiac related issues and sleep related issues are just a few. We also experience a similar or higher rate of suicide (we are just starting to track those numbers).
- Public Safety also brings a tremendous amount of money into the state through grants.
- Military retirees can retire at a higher benefit than most public safety, which maxes out at 50%. Most without any medical benefits unlike military, having to get coverage on their own.
- Public Safety also sees a large number of retirees who leave the State and relocate to other States. This is due to a variety of reasons with the tax on their pensions being one of the reasons.
- Recruitment and retention are major issues with public safety and are getting more challenging every year. While it has been hinted at that enticing military retirees into the State may help with this challenge. The fact is that it will have a minimal effect, if any on this issue. We tend to see more military veterans than retirees entering public safety due to the demanding nature of the job.
- It is also important to look at both military and public safety objectively and accurately to compare the two. Military service is noble and demanding but does have some perks that public safety personnel do not have. Housing allowance, bonuses, Education incentives (GI Bill and tuition assistance), 30 days annual leave, plus many more that public safety personnel do not get.
- Many veterans go into the public safety field after their service. The structure between the two are very similar. We do in fact have a chain of command and structure that is similar to the military. This is one of the reasons we see a large number of veterans getting into this occupation after serving. By adding public safety to this retiree and survivor benefit tax exemption proposal would, in fact, capture a large number of veterans.
- Not including Public Safety Retirees at the onset of this bill is very insulting and degrading to those who put their lives on the line every day. There is also the concern that it can be added later, which is a statement or position that I do not support and is a much harder hill to climb.
- Public Safety provides a valuable service to the community that often times gets very little recognition for that service or sacrifice. They also come under scrutiny, especially during budget deliberations. We see cuts in service requiring members to be tasked with providing services with less numbers and put members at greater risk. However, our members will always show up when you call 911.
- While I do have the utmost respect for our military who have or are currently serving and I do feel that they deserve recognition and support, public safety truly does parallel

military. The sacrifices and commitment are very similar. The danger and sacrifices are very similar. The commitment and dedication of both members are very similar. We both face dangers and are willing to put our lives on the line for others. Instead of working to eliminate public safety, both groups should be working together to get this same benefit, which would capture similar groups along with military veterans who serve in the military for 1-2 tours and go onto public safety. Many of them fulfill a long and rewarding career in public safety. I personally have had the honor of working with some great individuals who served in the armed forces and gone on to working in the fire service.

Respectfully,

Christopher M. Dube, President

Professional Firefighters of Vermont