The City *of* Worcester

Department of Health and Human Services
Veterans' Services Division

Welcome home to Worcester!

On behalf of the City of Worcester and your fellow veterans, thank you for your service and welcome to one of our nation's most distinctive communities: those who've worn the uniform of the United States Armed Forces. You're part of a relatively small percentage of Americans who have served, and we're thrilled to welcome you home to a City that has a centuries-long record of celebrating and honoring veterans.

I'm Bruce R. Mendelsohn, a third-generation U.S. Army veteran and Worcester's Veterans' Services Officer (VSO). I'm privileged to serve **YOU**.

Transitioning to civilian life can be challenging, even when things appear to be going well. Seeking support is a sign of strength, and resources are available to help you and your family navigate this transition. Take a few minutes to explore the programs and resources in this letter. You may find benefits, services, and opportunities you didn't know were available.

Caring and connected staff in our office can help you:

- ✓ Find and access federal, state, and local benefits and resources you've earned,
- ✓ Connect you to, and with, services and organizations that support your goals, and
- ✓ Introduce you to veterans and organizations in our region's vibrant military-connected community.

Most importantly, you don't have to be experiencing financial hardship or be in crisis to contact us. We can help you explore opportunities, answer questions about eligibility, and build a solid foundation for what lies ahead. If you or another veteran is experiencing an immediate emotional or mental health crisis, call 988 and press 1 to reach the Veterans Crisis Line (www.veteranscrisisline.net).

Massachusetts Welcome Home Bonus

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts offers a *Welcome Home Bonus* to eligible service members and veterans who served following September 11, 2001. Depending on your service, deployment history, and eligibility, you may qualify for a one-time payment. Certain residency and discharge requirements apply.

Discover more about eligibility and payment amounts (www.mass.gov/info-details/eligibility-requirements-and-payment-amounts-for-welcome-home-bonus) or apply for the Welcome Home Bonus (www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-a-global-war-on-terrorism-gwot-welcome-home-veterans-bonus). We can help you navigate the process and identify other MA veterans' bonuses that may apply to your service.

VA Disability Compensation

If you developed an injury, illness, or medical condition during your military service, or a pre-existing condition was aggravated by your service, you may be eligible for monthly disability compensation through the VA. Qualifying conditions can include physical injuries, hearing loss, and mental health conditions associated with military service. Learn more: VA Disability Compensation (www.va.gov/disability/).

You don't have to be a combat veteran to qualify for VA disability benefits! If you believe a current condition may be related to your service, we encourage you to explore your options rather than assume you're ineligible. Our office can help explain the claims process, identify supporting documentation, and connect you with accredited representatives who provide free claims assistance.

If you didn't receive a copy of your military medical records or DD-214 when you separated, you can request your military service and medical records through the National Archives (www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records). Keep copies of your discharge paperwork and medical records in a safe place and never share personal identifying information (PII) with unauthorized individuals or organizations.

Massachusetts Chapter 115 Benefits

Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 115 established a needs-based program of financial assistance for eligible veterans and their dependents who are experiencing financial hardship. Eligibility depends on applicable service, residency, income, assets, and other program requirements. Depending on your financial circumstances, funds may be available for essential living expenses, housing, medical costs, and other necessities.

Review Chapter 115 benefits (www.mass.gov/info-details/chapter-115-benefitssafety-net-program), use the Commonwealth's MassVets Benefit Estimator (vets.mass.gov) for an initial indication of potential eligibility, and/or complete our office's pre-screening form (https://forms.worcesterma.gov/ng/fa/VeteransSafetyNetProgram).

Even if you don't qualify for Chapter 115 assistance, we can help you identify other programs and resources that may be appropriate for you and your family.

VA Healthcare and Readjustment Services

Your health and well-being matter. You may qualify for VA healthcare, including preventive care, specialty services, mental healthcare, and support for service-connected conditions.

- **VA Healthcare:** Eligibility and enrollment (www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply/)
- **Worcester VA Clinic:** The VA operates an outpatient clinic at 403 Belmont Street — accessible by WRTA. Visit the VA facility locator (www.va.gov/find-locations/).
- **Worcester Vet Center:** Vet Centers offer readjustment counseling and other confidential support for eligible veterans, service members, and their families. Find services through the VA Vet Center locator (www.va.gov/find-locations/?facilityType=vet_center)

Please don't wait to seek support. There are many resources throughout the City to help you adjust to civilian life, navigate family changes, manage stress, get food, or just connect with others who understand military service and transitioning to civilian life. Use your resources!

Education, Employment, and Career Development

During your military experiences you picked up valuable skills, leadership, discipline, and adaptability. Whether you plan to attend college, pursue a technical credential, enter an apprenticeship, start a business, or join the civilian workforce, resources are available to help you make the most of your experience.

- **Education benefits:** Explore the GI Bill and VA education benefits (www.va.gov/education).
- **Employment and career services:** MassHire Veteran Career Services (www.mass.gov/info-details/veteran-career-services) connects veterans with employment reps, employers, training opportunities, and career resources. Veterans receive *Priority of Service* in qualifying employment, training, and placement programs funded by the U.S. Department of Labor. Visit MassHire Central Region Career Centers.
- **Massachusetts education and training resources:** The Commonwealth's Veteran Education, Employment, and Training Office (www.mass.gov/orgs/veteran-education-employment-training) lists education, career development, and professional pathways.

Even if you're already employed or have a clear career plan, check out these resources and options: You may discover benefits, training opportunities, or professional networks that can help you reach your next goal.

Additional State and Local Benefits

Depending on your circumstances, you may also qualify for other benefits, such as:

- **Property tax exemptions:** Eligible veterans may qualify for local property tax relief. Learn about Massachusetts veterans' property tax exemptions.
- **Bonuses and financial benefits:** Check out MassVets benefits information (www.mass.gov/massvets-veteran-state-financial-benefits).
- **Veteran motor vehicle services:** Explore Massachusetts RMV resources (www.mass.gov/military-and-veteran-rmv-information) for info about veteran license plates and applicable vehicle-related benefits. Vehicles with Veterans license plates park free in all metered spaces across the City—well worth the investment.
- **Women Veterans Network:** Explore Massachusetts Women Veterans Network | Mass.gov to learn more about this EOVS managed group that is dedicated to empowering women veterans, ensuring their voices are heard, their contributions acknowledged, and their well-being enhanced through education, advocacy, and collaboration

Connect with Fellow Veterans

Accessing the benefits you've earned is important, as is staying connected with fellow veterans. Regardless of your branch, rank, or military occupational specialty, you'll find Central Massachusetts is home to a robust network of veterans' organizations, service providers, and civic groups offering camaraderie, professional development, volunteerism, family support, and continued opportunities to serve.

- **City of Worcester Veterans' Services:** Local contact for veterans' benefits, referrals, and community resources (www.worcesterma.gov/veterans-services).
- **Worcester Veterans' Services Resource Directory:** Diverse local VA services, resources, and support (www.worcesterma.gov/veterans-services/veterans-referrals).
- **Massachusetts Executive Office of Veterans Services:** MA programs, veterans' organizations, and services (www.mass.gov/orgs/executive-office-of-veterans-services).
- **MassHire Veterans Services:** Employment resources, free/low-cost trainings, and veteran-friendly employers (www.mass.gov/info-details/veteran-career-services).

Community-based, nonprofit organizations such as Veterans Inc. (www.veteransinc.org), Veteran Pathways of New England (https://www.veteranpathwaysne.org), Project New Hope (www.projectnewhopema.org), Central Massachusetts Veterans Support Inc. (cmvsi.org), and FROST Call (www.frostcall.org) offer ways for you to connect with our veterans community. Their services and activities include housing and employment assistance, wellness retreats, family support, online gaming, peer connections, and more.

You also have an open invitation to participate in Worcester's annual Veterans Day and Memorial Day observances, community events, and other activities. Staying connected, building relationships, and participating in meaningful activities can support a stronger sense of belonging and well-being during the transition to civilian life and beyond.

Whether you're interested in volunteering, mentoring younger veterans, participating in civic activities, attending events, or simply meeting people who understand your experiences, contact us. We'll help you find opportunities that fit your interests.

Connect with US!

We want to meet you! Please make an appointment to visit us. We *usually* have coffee and we're *always* eager to chat about our military service. We look forward to helping you make the most of the opportunities and benefits you earned and you deserve.

City of Worcester Veterans' Services Division
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