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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-FOURTH SESSION

H. F. No. 3544

02/19/2026 Authored by Repinski
The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Veterans and Military Affairs Division
02/26/2026 Adoption of Report: Re-referred to the Committee on Health Finance and Policy

1.1 A bill for an act
1.2 relating to veterans; providing that certain veterans or former members of the
1.3 armed forces who have forfeited federal benefits do not qualify for state-funded
1.4 benefits, services, or programs; discontinuing the environmental hazards
1.5 information and assistance program for veterans; amending Minnesota Statutes
1.6 2024, section 196.021; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter
1.7 197; repealing Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 196.19; 196.21; 196.22,
1.8 subdivisions 1, 2, 3, 5; 196.23; 196.24; 196.25; 196.26; 197.225.

1.9 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.10 Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 196.021, is amended to read:

1.11 196.021 DEPUTY COMMISSIONERS; DUTIES.

1.12 Subdivision 1. Appointment. The commissioner shall appoint a deputy commissioner
1.13 for veteran services, a deputy commissioner for administration, and a deputy commissioner
1.14 for veteran health care. Both Deputy commissioners serve in the unclassified service at the
1.15 pleasure of the commissioner. Both deputies Deputy commissioners must be residents of
1.16 Minnesota, citizens of the United States, and veterans as defined in section 197.447.

1.17 Subd. 2. Powers and duties. The deputy commissioner for veteran services and, the
1.18 deputy commissioner for veteran health care, and the deputy commissioner for administration
1.19 have those powers delegated by the commissioner. A delegation must be in writing, signed
1.20 by the commissioner, and filed with the secretary of state.

1.21 Sec. 2. [197.792] FORFEITURE OF BENEFITS.

1.22 An individual who is a veteran, as defined under section 197.447, or a former member
1.23 of the armed forces does not qualify for state-funded benefits, services, or programs if the

2.1 United States Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the individual has forfeited
2.2 the individual's entitlement to federal benefits according to United States Code, title 38,
2.3 chapter 61.

2.4 Sec. 3. **REPEALER.**

2.5 Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 196.19; 196.21; 196.22, subdivisions 1, 2, 3, and 5;
2.6 196.23; 196.24; 196.25; 196.26; and 197.225, are repealed.

**196.19 ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ACT;
CITATION.**

Sections 196.19 to 196.26 may be cited as the "Environmental Hazards Information and Assistance Act."

196.21 DEFINITIONS.

Subdivision 1. **Scope.** For the purposes of sections 196.19 to 196.26 the following terms have the meanings given them.

Subd. 2. **Veteran.** "Veteran" means a person who is a resident of this state and who served in the armed forces of the United States of America.

Subd. 3. **Chemical agents.** "Chemical agents" means Agent Orange and any other identified or unidentified chemical substance or compounds suspected by medical experts of adversely affecting the physical, mental, or emotional health of members of the armed forces.

Subd. 4. **Agent Orange.** "Agent Orange" means any herbicide, defoliant, or pesticide containing dioxin and composed primarily of trichlorophenoxyacetic acid and dichlorophenoxyacetic acid.

Subd. 5. **Commissioner.** "Commissioner" means the commissioner of veterans affairs.

196.22 POWERS AND DUTIES OF COMMISSIONER.

Subdivision 1. **Environmental hazards information and assistance program.** The commissioner shall establish and maintain an environmental hazards information and assistance program. The commissioner shall:

(1) provide information regarding epidemiological, genetic, and other scientific studies proposed, underway, or completed that pertain to adverse health conditions which may be associated with exposure to chemical agents;

(2) monitor and report on the activities and policies of the United States government relating to the exposure of veterans to chemical agents; and

(3) respond, within the commissioner's powers and duties under this chapter and chapter 197, to other issues of concern to veterans relating to exposure to chemical agents.

Subd. 2. **Referral programs.** The commissioner, in cooperation with the United States Veterans Administration, county veterans service officers, and veterans organizations shall institute referral programs to:

(1) refer veterans to appropriate federal agencies or other available resources for treatment of adverse health conditions which may have resulted from possible exposure to chemical agents; and

(2) refer veterans to state, county, or veterans organizations advocacy services to assist them in filing compensation claims for disabilities that may have resulted from possible exposure to chemical agents.

Subd. 3. **Limited studies.** The commissioner may contract for limited studies regarding the prevalence of adverse health conditions in veterans which may be associated with possible exposure to chemical agents. Prior to contracting for such studies, the commissioner shall consult with the commissioner of health, the University of Minnesota School of Public Health, and other appropriate scientific and technical advisors pertaining to their design.

Subd. 5. **Communication of veterans' concerns.** Within the commissioner's powers and duties under chapters 196 and 197, the commissioner shall take any action appropriate to represent to appropriate officials and representatives of the United States government the concerns of veterans related to exposure to chemical agents.

196.23 ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE SECTION.

Subdivision 1. **Establishment of section.** The commissioner shall establish an environmental hazards information and assistance section in the Department of Veterans Affairs. The section shall be headed by a director. The commissioner shall provide the director with office space, administrative services, and clerical support.

Subd. 2. **Position of director.** The director of the environmental hazards information and assistance section shall be appointed by the commissioner. The director shall assist the commissioner in carrying out the duties and responsibilities required under sections 196.19 to 196.26. The

commissioner of management and budget, in consultation with the commissioner, shall establish minimum qualifications for the position of director. In setting the minimum qualifications, the commissioner of management and budget shall consider the scientific and technical background necessary to perform the duties under sections 196.19 to 196.26.

196.24 DUTIES OF COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH.

Subdivision 1. **Information to health professionals.** The commissioner of health shall provide medical information to health professionals in this state regarding the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of acute and chronic symptoms which may be associated with exposure to chemical agents.

Subd. 2. **Genetic information and counseling.** The commissioner of health, in cooperation with the health facilities of the University of Minnesota, shall provide genetic information and counseling to veterans who have concerns regarding the possible genetic effects which may be associated with exposure to chemical agents.

Subd. 3. **Technical assistance.** The commissioner of health shall provide scientific information and other appropriate technical assistance necessary to enable the commissioner to perform the duties and responsibilities required under sections 196.19 to 196.26.

196.25 CONFIDENTIALITY.

The identity of a veteran about whom information has been received under sections 196.19 to 196.26 is classified as private data pursuant to section 13.02, subdivision 12, and may not be disclosed unless the veteran consents to the disclosure. Summary data, as defined in section 13.02, subdivision 19, derived from information received under sections 196.19 to 196.26 is public information.

196.26 CLASS ACTION REPRESENTATION BY ATTORNEY GENERAL.

The commissioner may request the attorney general to represent a class of individuals composed of veterans who may have suffered adverse health conditions as a result of possible exposure to chemical agents in a suit for release of information relating to exposure to these chemicals during military service and for release of individual medical records.

197.225 LIST OF DECEASED MILITARY PERSONNEL.

(a) The commissioner of veterans affairs shall collect and maintain data about Minnesota residents who have died of service-connected causes while serving in the United States armed forces. The data may include deceased service members who are the immediate family members of Minnesota residents, but who themselves were not Minnesota residents at the time of death. The commissioner shall collect the following data: the individual's full name, military rank, branch of service, age at the time of death, and Minnesota hometown or if not a Minnesota resident at the time of death, the service member's home state.

(b) Data collected pursuant to this section are nonpublic data, but may be disseminated to the individual's next of kin, and for ceremonial or honorary purposes to veterans' organizations, civic organizations, the news media, and researchers. No other use or dissemination of the data is permitted.

(c) The next of kin of a veteran whose data is collected may request that the data not be disseminated for any purpose. Upon receiving such a request, the Department of Veterans Affairs must exclude the deceased veteran's data from any data disseminated for ceremonial or honorary purposes as permitted by paragraph (b).

(d) Data collected pursuant to this section shall not be indicative of any person's status with regard to qualification for veterans benefits or other benefits.