

1.1 Stephenson and Torkelson from the Committee on Ways and Means to which was
1.2 referred:

1.3 S. F. No. 1959, A bill for an act relating to state government; establishing a budget for
1.4 the Department of Military Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs; modifying
1.5 veterans services and benefits provisions; requiring the commissioner of administration to
1.6 place a memorial plaque honoring Gold Star and Blue Star families on State Capitol grounds;
1.7 providing benefits to veterans of the Secret War in Laos; requiring county veteran services
1.8 officers to aid certain additional veterans; establishing a task force; requiring reports;
1.9 appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 13.461, subdivision 27;
1.10 193.143; 197.065; 197.236, subdivisions 8, 9; 197.603, subdivision 1; 197.608, subdivision
1.11 6; 197.75, subdivision 1; 197.791, subdivision 4; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota
1.12 Statutes, chapter 197.

1.13 Reported the same back with the following amendments:

1.14 Delete everything after the enacting clause and insert:

1.15 **"ARTICLE 1**

1.16 **MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS**

1.17 Section 1. **APPROPRIATIONS.**

1.18 The sums shown in the columns marked "Appropriations" are appropriated to the agencies
1.19 and for the purposes specified in this article. The appropriations are from the general fund,
1.20 or another named fund, and are available for the fiscal years indicated for each purpose.
1.21 The figures "2026" and "2027" used in this article mean that the appropriations listed under
1.22 them are available for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, or June 30, 2027, respectively.
1.23 "The first year" is fiscal year 2026. "The second year" is fiscal year 2027. "The biennium"
1.24 is fiscal years 2026 and 2027.

1.25 **APPROPRIATIONS**

1.26 **Available for the Year**

1.27 **Ending June 30**

1.28 **2026**

2027

1.29 Sec. 2. **MILITARY AFFAIRS**

3.1 service organizations as designated by the
3.2 commissioner: Disabled American Veterans,
3.3 Military Order of the Purple Heart, the
3.4 American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars,
3.5 AMVETS, and Paralyzed Veterans of
3.6 America. This funding must be allocated in
3.7 direct proportion to the funding currently
3.8 being provided by the commissioner to these
3.9 organizations.

3.10 **(c) Honor Guards.** \$200,000 each year is for
3.11 compensation for honor guards at the funerals
3.12 of veterans under Minnesota Statutes, section
3.13 197.231.

3.14 **(d) Minnesota GI Bill.** \$200,000 each year is
3.15 for the costs of administering the Minnesota
3.16 GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits,
3.17 on-the-job training, and apprenticeship
3.18 program under Minnesota Statutes, section
3.19 197.791.

3.20 **(e) Gold Star Program.** \$100,000 each year
3.21 is for administering the Gold Star Program for
3.22 surviving family members of deceased
3.23 veterans.

3.24 **(f) County Veterans Service Office.**
3.25 \$1,610,000 each year is for the County
3.26 Veterans Service Office grant program under
3.27 Minnesota Statutes, section 197.608. Of this
3.28 amount, \$20,000 is for a women veterans
3.29 technical assistance coordinator, \$20,000 is
3.30 for a veteran suicide prevention technical
3.31 assistance coordinator, and \$20,000 is for a
3.32 justice-involved veteran technical assistance
3.33 coordinator. Any unencumbered balance in
3.34 the first year does not cancel and is available
3.35 in the second year.

- 4.1 **(g) Comprehensive Plan to Prevent Veteran**
4.2 **Suicides in Minnesota.** The commissioner
4.3 shall develop a comprehensive plan to prevent
4.4 Minnesota veterans from dying by suicide.
4.5 The plan must include:
- 4.6 (1) a community integration and collaboration
4.7 strategy that brings together veteran-serving
4.8 organizations to provide veterans with
4.9 coordinated services and supports, including
4.10 services and supports related to employment,
4.11 health, housing, benefits, recreation, education,
4.12 and social connections;
- 4.13 (2) strategies to promote a sense of belonging
4.14 and purpose among veterans by connecting
4.15 veterans with each other, with civilians, and
4.16 with the veteran's communities through a
4.17 range of activities, including physical activity,
4.18 community service, and disaster response
4.19 efforts; and
- 4.20 (3) an implementation strategy that identifies
4.21 opportunities to coordinate existing efforts
4.22 within federal, state, local, and Tribal
4.23 governments and nongovernmental entities
4.24 and includes a description of the policy
4.25 changes and resources that are required to
4.26 prevent veteran suicides.
- 4.27 The commissioner must submit a report
4.28 containing the required plan to the chairs and
4.29 ranking minority members of the legislative
4.30 committees with jurisdiction over veterans
4.31 affairs policy and finance by February 15,
4.32 2026.
- 4.33 **(h) Homeless Veterans and SOAR Program.**
4.34 \$1,394,000 each year is to operate the

5.1 homeless veteran registry and homeless
5.2 programs and to assist veterans, former service
5.3 members, and veterans' and former service
5.4 members' dependents with obtaining federal
5.5 benefits through the Social Security
5.6 Administration. The commissioner of veterans
5.7 affairs may use money for personnel, training,
5.8 research, marketing, and professional or
5.9 technical contracts.

5.10 **(i) State Soldiers Assistance Program.**
5.11 \$5,600,000 each year is for veteran financial
5.12 assistance through the state soldiers assistance
5.13 program.

5.14 **(j) Higher Education Veterans Assistance.**
5.15 \$1,629,000 each year is for veterans higher
5.16 education assistance.

5.17 **(k) Claims and Outreach Office.** \$3,621,000
5.18 each year is for the claims and outreach office
5.19 to assist veterans and the veterans' families in
5.20 accessing benefits and services.

5.21 **(l) Camp Bliss.** \$1,000 the first year is for a
5.22 grant to Independent Lifestyles, Inc., to
5.23 provide therapy, transportation, and activities
5.24 customized for veterans who are Minnesota
5.25 residents and the veterans' spouses, domestic
5.26 partners, and children at Camp Bliss in the
5.27 city of Walker. The commissioner of veterans
5.28 affairs must report to the chairs and ranking
5.29 minority members of the legislative
5.30 committees with jurisdiction over veterans
5.31 affairs on:

5.32 (1) the number of veterans and veterans'
5.33 family members served; and

6.1 (2) a detailed explanation of expenditures of
6.2 the grant money.

6.3 **(m) Veterans of Secret Guerilla Units and**
6.4 **Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task**
6.5 **Force.** \$118,000 the first year is for the
6.6 commissioner to staff and support the work
6.7 of Veterans of Secret Guerilla Units and
6.8 Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force.

6.9 **(n) Metro Meals on Wheels.** \$250,000 each
6.10 year is for a grant to Metro Meals on Wheels
6.11 to provide: (1) home-delivered meals to
6.12 veterans; and (2) technical, enrollment,
6.13 outreach, and volunteer recruitment assistance
6.14 to member programs. Metro Meals on Wheels
6.15 must report to the commissioner of veterans
6.16 affairs and the chairs and ranking minority
6.17 members of the legislative committees with
6.18 jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and
6.19 finance by September 1 each year with a
6.20 detailed explanation of how the grant money
6.21 was used and the number of veterans and
6.22 service members served by the program. The
6.23 base for this appropriation is \$250,000 in fiscal
6.24 year 2028 and each fiscal year thereafter.

6.25 **(o) Hometown Hero Outdoors.** \$1,000 the
6.26 first year is for a grant to Hometown Hero
6.27 Outdoors, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
6.28 based in Stillwater, Minnesota, to fund outdoor
6.29 recreational activities and mental health
6.30 services for currently serving military
6.31 personnel and veterans to promote positive
6.32 mental health and interactions with mental
6.33 health service professionals; to promote
6.34 longevity and quality of life through outdoor
6.35 activities and mental health services, including

7.1 public education; and to ensure that the
7.2 organization is able to continue supporting
7.3 persons who are currently serving or have
7.4 served in the military. Hometown Hero
7.5 Outdoors must report to the commissioner of
7.6 veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking
7.7 minority members of the legislative
7.8 committees with jurisdiction over veterans
7.9 affairs policy and finance no later than
7.10 September 1, 2026, and by September 1 of
7.11 each subsequent year. Each report must
7.12 include, at a minimum, a detailed explanation
7.13 of how the grant money was used and the
7.14 number of veterans served by the program.

7.15 **(p) Veterans on the Lake. \$1,000 the first**
7.16 **year is for a grant to Veterans on the Lake for**
7.17 **expenses related to retreats for veterans,**
7.18 **including therapy, transportation, and activities**
7.19 **customized for veterans. Veterans on the Lake**
7.20 **must report to the commissioner of veterans**
7.21 **affairs and the chairs and ranking minority**
7.22 **members of the legislative committees with**
7.23 **jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and**
7.24 **finance no later than September 1, 2026, and**
7.25 **by September 1 of each subsequent year. Each**
7.26 **report must include, at a minimum, a detailed**
7.27 **explanation of how the grant money was used**
7.28 **and the number of veterans served by the**
7.29 **program.**

7.30 **(q) Fishing with Vets. \$1,000 the first year is**
7.31 **for a grant to Fishing with Vets to organize**
7.32 **and conduct guided fishing trips for veterans**
7.33 **across Minnesota. Fishing with Vets must**
7.34 **report to the commissioner of veterans affairs**
7.35 **and the chairs and ranking minority members**

8.1 of the legislative committees with jurisdiction
8.2 over veterans affairs policy and finance no
8.3 later than September 1, 2026, and by
8.4 September 1 of each subsequent year. Each
8.5 report must include, at a minimum, a detailed
8.6 explanation of how the grant money was used
8.7 and the number of veterans served by the
8.8 program.

8.9 **(r) Veteran Mentorship Program for Black**
8.10 **Youth.** \$1,000 the first year is for the
8.11 commissioner of veterans affairs to award a
8.12 grant to an organization to develop, operate,
8.13 and administer a veteran mentorship program
8.14 to prevent youth violence through employing
8.15 veterans who will mentor Black youth and
8.16 assisting Black youth in exploring career
8.17 opportunities in the armed forces. The grant
8.18 recipient must report to the commissioner of
8.19 veterans affairs and the chairs and ranking
8.20 minority members of the legislative
8.21 committees with jurisdiction over veterans
8.22 affairs policy and finance no later than
8.23 September 1, 2026, and by September 1 of
8.24 each subsequent year. Each report must
8.25 include, at a minimum, a detailed explanation
8.26 of how the grant money was used and the
8.27 number of veterans participating in the
8.28 program.

8.29 **(s) CORE Program.** \$1,475,000 each year is
8.30 for the Counseling and Case Management
8.31 Outreach Referral and Education (CORE)
8.32 program.

8.33 **(t) LinkVet Call Center.** \$369,000 each year
8.34 is for the operation of the state's LinkVet Call
8.35 Center.

9.1 **(u) Recently Separated Veterans Program.**
 9.2 \$300,000 each year is for the operation of the
 9.3 recently separated veterans program. The
 9.4 commissioner of veterans affairs may use
 9.5 Department of Defense and other veteran data
 9.6 that was provided with an appropriate
 9.7 disclosure to assist with connecting veterans
 9.8 to resources and new programming. The
 9.9 commissioner may use money for personnel,
 9.10 research, marketing, technology solutions, and
 9.11 professional or technical contracts.

9.12 **(v) Minnesota Military and Veterans**
 9.13 **Museum.** \$300,000 each year is for a grant to
 9.14 the Minnesota Military and Veterans Museum
 9.15 for museum staff to provide direct services to
 9.16 veterans and their families.

9.17 **Subd. 3. Veterans Health Care** 100,187,000 101,353,000

9.18 (a) \$98,137,000 the first year and \$99,303,000
 9.19 the second year may be transferred to a
 9.20 veterans homes special revenue account in the
 9.21 special revenue fund in the same manner as
 9.22 other receipts are deposited according to
 9.23 Minnesota Statutes, section 198.34, and are
 9.24 appropriated to the commissioner of veterans
 9.25 affairs for the operation of veterans homes
 9.26 facilities and programs. The base for this
 9.27 transfer is \$99,204,000 in fiscal year 2028 and
 9.28 each fiscal year thereafter.

9.29 (b) The department shall seek opportunities
 9.30 to maximize federal reimbursements of
 9.31 Medicare-eligible expenses and provide annual
 9.32 reports to the commissioner of management
 9.33 and budget on the federal Medicare
 9.34 reimbursements that are received. Contingent
 9.35 upon future federal Medicare receipts,

- 10.1 reductions to the veterans homes' general fund
- 10.2 appropriation may be made.
- 10.3 (c) \$400,000 each year is for the department
- 10.4 to staff Veteran Community Health Navigators
- 10.5 in community-based hospitals.
- 10.6 (d) \$1,650,000 each year is for the department
- 10.7 to operate the veteran suicide prevention
- 10.8 program.
- 10.9 (e) The commissioner of veterans affairs is
- 10.10 not required to perform the annual calculation
- 10.11 of the cost of care for veterans homes in
- 10.12 Montevideo, Preston, and Bemidji in the first
- 10.13 year and second year. In the first year and
- 10.14 second year, the commissioner must calculate
- 10.15 the average daily cost of care per resident by
- 10.16 averaging the cost of care of veterans homes
- 10.17 in Luverne and Fergus Falls. The
- 10.18 commissioner must only use this method of
- 10.19 calculating the cost of care of veterans homes
- 10.20 in the first year and second year. This
- 10.21 paragraph expires June 30, 2027.

ARTICLE 2

MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS AFFAIRS POLICY

10.24 Section 1. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 13.461, subdivision 27, is amended to read:

10.25 Subd. 27. ~~State soldiers assistance program~~ Veterans affairs programs. Access to

10.26 information for purposes of verifying eligibility for the State Soldiers Assistance Program,

10.27 the Veterans Stable Housing Initiative, and veterans programs is governed by section

10.28 197.065.

10.29 Sec. 2. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 192.49, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

10.30 Subdivision 1. **Officers.** Every commissioned officer of the military forces shall receive

10.31 from the state, while engaged in any state active service ordered by the governor as defined

10.32 in section 190.05, subdivision 5a, pay and allowances at the rate now or hereafter paid or

11.1 allowed by law to officers of the same grade and length of service in the armed forces of
11.2 the United States, but not less than \$130 a day.

11.3 Sec. 3. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 192.49, subdivision 2, is amended to read:

11.4 Subd. 2. **Enlisted persons.** When called into state active service by the governor, other
11.5 than for encampment or maneuvers, including the time necessarily consumed in travel, each
11.6 enlisted person of the military forces shall be paid by the state the pay and the allowances,
11.7 when not furnished in kind, provided by law for enlisted persons of similar grade, rating,
11.8 and length of service in the armed forces of the United States, or \$130 a day, whichever is
11.9 more.

11.10 Sec. 4. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 192.49, is amended by adding a subdivision to
11.11 read:

11.12 Subd. 2a. **Pension offset stipend.** The adjutant general is authorized to pay service
11.13 members ordered into state active service a stipend equivalent to five percent of basic pay
11.14 for the period of duty to compensate the service member for pension inequity compared to
11.15 similar federal service.

11.16 Sec. 5. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 193.143, is amended to read:

11.17 **193.143 STATE ARMORY BUILDING COMMISSION, POWERS.**

11.18 Such corporation, subject to the conditions and limitations prescribed in sections 193.141
11.19 to 193.149, shall possess all the powers of a body corporate necessary and convenient to
11.20 accomplish the objectives and perform the duties prescribed by sections 193.141 to 193.149,
11.21 including the following, which shall not be construed as a limitation upon the general powers
11.22 hereby conferred:

11.23 (1) To acquire by lease, purchase, gift, or condemnation proceedings all necessary right,
11.24 title, and interest in and to the lands required for a site for a new armory and all other real
11.25 or personal property required for the purposes contemplated by the Military Code and to
11.26 hold and dispose of the same, subject to the conditions and limitations herein prescribed;
11.27 provided that any such real or personal property or interest therein may be so acquired or
11.28 accepted subject to any condition which may be imposed thereon by the grantor or donor
11.29 and agreed to by such corporation not inconsistent with the proper use of such property by
11.30 the state for armory or military purposes as herein provided.

11.31 (2) To exercise the power of eminent domain in the manner provided by chapter 117,
11.32 for the purpose of acquiring any property which such corporation is herein authorized to

12.1 acquire by condemnation; provided, that the corporation may take possession of any such
12.2 property so to be acquired at any time after the filing of the petition describing the same in
12.3 condemnation proceedings; provided further, that this shall not preclude the corporation
12.4 from abandoning the condemnation of any such property in any case where possession
12.5 thereof has not been taken.

12.6 (3) To construct and equip new armories as authorized herein; to pay therefor out of the
12.7 funds obtained as hereinafter provided and to hold, manage, and dispose of such armory,
12.8 equipment, and site as hereinafter provided. The total amount of bonds issued on account
12.9 of such armories shall not exceed the amount of the cost thereof; provided also, that the
12.10 total bonded indebtedness of the commission shall not at any time exceed the aggregate
12.11 sum of ~~\$15,000,000~~ \$45,000,000.

12.12 (4) To provide partnerships with federal and state governments and to match federal and
12.13 local funds, when available.

12.14 (5) To sue and be sued.

12.15 (6) To contract and be contracted with in any matter connected with any purpose or
12.16 activity within the powers of such corporations as herein specified; provided, that no officer
12.17 or member of such corporation shall be personally interested, directly or indirectly, in any
12.18 contract in which such corporation is interested.

12.19 (7) To employ any and all professional and nonprofessional services and all agents,
12.20 employees, workers, and servants necessary and proper for the purposes and activities of
12.21 such corporation as authorized or contemplated herein and to pay for the same out of any
12.22 portion of the income of the corporation available for such purposes or activities. The officers
12.23 and members of such corporation shall not receive any compensation therefrom, but may
12.24 receive their reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in connection with the performance
12.25 of their duties; provided however, that whenever the duties of any member of the commission
12.26 require full time and attention the commission may compensate the member therefor at such
12.27 rates as it may determine.

12.28 (8) To borrow money and issue bonds for the purposes and in the manner and within
12.29 the limitations herein specified, and to pledge any and all property and income of such
12.30 corporation acquired or received as herein provided to secure the payment of such bonds,
12.31 subject to the provisions and limitations herein prescribed, and to redeem any such bonds
12.32 if so provided therein or in the mortgage or trust deed accompanying the same.

12.33 (9) To use for the following purposes any available money received by such corporation
12.34 from any source as herein provided in excess of those required for the payment of the cost

13.1 of such armory and for the payment of any bonds issued by the corporation and interest
13.2 thereon according to the terms of such bonds or of any mortgage or trust deed accompanying
13.3 the same:

13.4 (a) to pay the necessary incidental expenses of carrying on the business and activities
13.5 of the corporation as herein authorized;

13.6 (b) to pay the cost of operating, maintaining, repairing, and improving such new armories;

13.7 (c) if any further excess money remains, to purchase upon the open market at or above
13.8 or below the face or par value thereof any bonds issued by the corporation as herein
13.9 authorized, provided that any bonds so purchased shall thereupon be canceled.

13.10 (10) To adopt and use a corporate seal.

13.11 (11) To adopt all needful bylaws and rules for the conduct of business and affairs of
13.12 such corporation and for the management and use of all armories while under the ownership
13.13 and control of such corporation as herein provided, not inconsistent with the use of such
13.14 armory for armory or military purposes.

13.15 (12) Such corporation shall issue no stock.

13.16 (13) No officer or member of such corporation shall have any personal share or interest
13.17 in any funds or property of the corporation or be subject to any personal liability by reason
13.18 of any liability of the corporation.

13.19 (14) The Minnesota State Armory Building Commission created under section 193.142
13.20 shall keep all money and credits received by it as a single fund, to be designated as the
13.21 "Minnesota State Armory Building Commission fund," with separate accounts for each
13.22 armory; and the commission may make transfers of money from funds appertaining to any
13.23 armory under its control for use for any other such armory; provided such transfers shall
13.24 be made only from money on hand, from time to time, in excess of the amounts required
13.25 to meet payments of interest or principal on bonds or other obligations appertaining to the
13.26 armory to which such funds pertain and only when necessary to pay expenses of construction,
13.27 operation, maintenance, debt service, and other obligations reasonable and necessary, of
13.28 such other armory; provided further, no such transfer of any money paid for the support of
13.29 any armory by the municipality in which such armory is situated shall be made by the
13.30 commission.

13.31 (15) The corporation created under section 193.142 may designate one or more state or
13.32 national banks as depositories of its funds, and may provide, upon such conditions as the
13.33 corporation may determine, that the treasurer of the corporation shall be exempt from

14.1 personal liability for loss of funds deposited in any such depository due to the insolvency
14.2 or other acts or omissions of such depository.

14.3 (16) The governor is empowered to apply for grants of money, equipment, and materials
14.4 which may be made available to the states by the federal government for leasing, building,
14.5 and equipping armories for the use of the military forces of the state which are reserve
14.6 components of the armed forces of the United States, whenever the governor is satisfied
14.7 that the conditions under which such grants are offered by the federal government, are for
14.8 the best interests of the state and are not inconsistent with the laws of the state relating to
14.9 armories, and to accept such grants in the name of the state. The Minnesota State Armory
14.10 Building Commission is designated as the agency of the state to receive such grants and to
14.11 use them for armory purposes as prescribed in this chapter, and by federal laws, and
14.12 regulations not inconsistent therewith.

14.13 Sec. 6. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.065, is amended to read:

14.14 **197.065 ACCESS TO DATABASE.**

14.15 (a) Notwithstanding section 13.46, subdivision 2, the commissioner of veterans affairs
14.16 may electronically access the MAXIS database maintained by the Department of Human
14.17 Services Children, Youth, and Families for the purpose of verifying eligibility status of
14.18 applicants for benefits under the State Soldiers Assistance Program, the Veterans Stable
14.19 Housing Initiative, and veterans programs. The commissioner may electronically access
14.20 the MAXIS database to ensure that veterans are connected to all available state and federal
14.21 resources for which the veterans are eligible.

14.22 (b) In order to access any private data on individuals, as defined by section 13.02,
14.23 subdivision 12, pursuant to paragraph (a), the commissioner of veterans affairs must have
14.24 received informed consent from the subject of the data.

14.25 Sec. 7. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.236, subdivision 8, is amended to read:

14.26 Subd. 8. **Eligibility.** Cemeteries must be operated solely for the burial of service members
14.27 who die on active duty, eligible veterans, and their spouses and dependent children, as
14.28 defined in United States Code, title 38, section ~~401~~ 2402, paragraph ~~(2)~~ (a), subparagraphs
14.29 1 to 5 and 7.

14.30 Sec. 8. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.236, subdivision 9, is amended to read:

14.31 Subd. 9. **Burial fees.** (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs shall establish a fee
14.32 schedule, which may be adjusted from time to time, for the interment of eligible spouses

15.1 and dependent children. The fees shall cover as nearly as practicable the actual costs of
 15.2 interment, excluding the value of the plot.

15.3 (b) Upon application, the commissioner may waive or reduce the burial fee for an indigent
 15.4 eligible person. The commissioner shall ~~develop~~ maintain a policy, eligibility standards,
 15.5 and application form for requests to waive or reduce the burial fee to indigent eligible
 15.6 applicants.

15.7 (c) No plot or interment fees may be charged for the burial of service members who die
 15.8 on active duty or eligible veterans, as defined in United States Code, title 38, section ~~401~~
 15.9 2402, paragraph (2) (a), subparagraphs 1 to 4 and 7.

15.10 **Sec. 9. [197.448] VETERAN OF THE SECRET WAR IN LAOS.**

15.11 Subdivision 1. **Definition.** As used in this section, the term "veteran of the secret war
 15.12 in Laos" means a person who resides in Minnesota and who:

15.13 (1) was naturalized as provided in section 2(1) of the federal Hmong Veterans'
 15.14 Naturalization Act of 2000, Public Law 106-207; or

15.15 (2) is a person who the commissioner of veterans affairs determines served honorably
 15.16 with a special guerrilla unit or with irregular forces that operated from a base in Laos in
 15.17 support of the armed forces of the United States at any time during the period beginning
 15.18 February 28, 1961, and ending May 14, 1975, and is a citizen of the United States or an
 15.19 alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence in the United States.

15.20 Subd. 2. **Eligibility for benefits and privileges.** (a) A veteran of the secret war in Laos,
 15.21 as defined in subdivision 1, clause (1), is entitled to the benefits and privileges listed in
 15.22 paragraph (c) the day following the effective date of this act.

15.23 (b) A veteran of the secret war in Laos, as defined in subdivision 1, clause (2), is entitled
 15.24 to the benefits and privileges listed in paragraph (c) after the commissioner of veterans
 15.25 affairs verifies the person's veteran status. The commissioner must not begin accepting
 15.26 applications for verification until the legislature enacts criteria and a protocol to determine:

15.27 (1) which Minnesotans served in secret guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos;
 15.28 and

15.29 (2) which of the Minnesotans who served in secret guerilla units or with irregular forces
 15.30 in Laos are deserving of Minnesota veterans benefits.

15.31 (c) The following statutory benefits and privileges available to a veteran, as defined in
 15.32 section 197.447, are also available to a veteran of the secret war in Laos: section 171.07,

16.1 subdivision 15 (veteran designation on drivers' licenses and state identification cards);
16.2 section 197.23 (purchase of grave markers); section 197.231 (honor guards); section 197.236
16.3 (state veterans cemeteries); section 197.455 (veterans preference); section 197.4551
16.4 (permissive preference for veterans in private employment); section 197.55 (quarters for
16.5 meetings of veterans organizations); section 197.56 (use of quarters); section 197.58 (veterans
16.6 organizations); section 197.61 (veterans service organizations grant program); section 197.63
16.7 (vital records, certified copies); section 197.65 (renewal of professional license, motor
16.8 vehicle registration, and driver's license); and section 197.987 (honor and remember flag).

16.9 Sec. 10. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.75, subdivision 1, is amended to read:

16.10 Subdivision 1. **Definitions.** (a) The definitions in this subdivision apply to this section.

16.11 (b) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of veterans affairs.

16.12 (c) "Deceased veteran" means a veteran who has died as a result of the person's military
16.13 service, as determined by the United States Veterans Administration, and who was a resident
16.14 of this state: (1) within six months of entering the United States armed forces, or (2) for the
16.15 six months preceding the veteran's date of death.

16.16 (d) "Eligible child" means a person who:

16.17 (1) is the natural or adopted child or stepchild of a deceased veteran; and

16.18 (2) is a student making satisfactory academic progress at an eligible institution of higher
16.19 education.

16.20 (e) "Eligible institution" means a postsecondary educational institution located in this
16.21 state that either is operated by this state or the Board of Regents of the University of
16.22 Minnesota, or is licensed or registered with the Office of Higher Education.

16.23 (f) "Eligible spouse" means the surviving spouse of a deceased veteran, regardless of
16.24 whether the surviving spouse remarries.

16.25 (g) "Eligible veteran" means a veteran who:

16.26 (1) is a student making satisfactory academic progress at an eligible institution of higher
16.27 education;

16.28 (2) had Minnesota as the person's state of residence at the time of the person's enlistment
16.29 or any reenlistment into the United States armed forces, as shown by the person's federal
16.30 form DD-214 or other official documentation to the satisfaction of the commissioner;

17.1 (3) except for benefits under this section, has no remaining military or veteran-related
17.2 educational assistance benefits for which the person may have been entitled; and

17.3 (4) while using the educational assistance authorized in this section, remains a resident
17.4 student as defined in section 136A.101, subdivision 8.

17.5 (h) "Satisfactory academic progress" has the meaning given in section 136A.101,
17.6 subdivision 10.

17.7 (i) "Student" has the meaning given in section 136A.101, subdivision 7.

17.8 (j) "Veteran" has the meaning given in section 197.447.

17.9 Sec. 11. Minnesota Statutes 2024, section 197.791, subdivision 4, is amended to read:

17.10 Subd. 4. **Eligibility.** (a) A person is eligible for educational assistance under subdivision
17.11 5 if:

17.12 (1) the person is:

17.13 (i) a veteran who is serving or has served honorably in any branch or unit of the United
17.14 States armed forces at any time;

17.15 (ii) a nonveteran who has served honorably for a total of five years or more cumulatively
17.16 as a member of the Minnesota National Guard or any other active or reserve component of
17.17 the United States armed forces, and any part of that service occurred on or after September
17.18 11, 2001;

17.19 (iii) the surviving spouse or child of a person who has served in the military and who
17.20 has died as a direct result of that military service, only if the surviving spouse or child is
17.21 eligible to receive federal education benefits under United States Code, title 38, chapter 33,
17.22 as amended, or United States Code, title 38, chapter 35, as amended, except that remarriage
17.23 does not terminate a surviving spouse's eligibility; or

17.24 (iv) the spouse or child of a person who has served in the military at any time and who
17.25 has a total and permanent service-connected disability as rated by the United States Veterans
17.26 Administration, only if the spouse or child is eligible to receive federal education benefits
17.27 under United States Code, title 38, chapter 33, as amended, or United States Code, title 38,
17.28 chapter 35, as amended; and

17.29 (2) the person receiving the educational assistance is a Minnesota resident, as defined
17.30 in section 136A.101, subdivision 8; and

17.31 (3) the person receiving the educational assistance:

- 18.1 (i) is an undergraduate or graduate student at an eligible institution;
- 18.2 (ii) is maintaining satisfactory academic progress as defined by the institution for students
18.3 participating in federal Title IV programs;
- 18.4 (iii) is enrolled in an education program leading to a certificate, diploma, or degree at
18.5 an eligible institution;
- 18.6 (iv) has applied for educational assistance under this section prior to the end of the
18.7 academic term for which the assistance is being requested;
- 18.8 (v) is in compliance with child support payment requirements under section 136A.121,
18.9 subdivision 2, clause (5); and
- 18.10 (vi) has completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- 18.11 (b) A person's eligibility terminates when the person becomes eligible for benefits under
18.12 section 135A.52.
- 18.13 (c) To determine eligibility, the commissioner may require official documentation,
18.14 including the person's federal form DD-214 or other official military discharge papers;
18.15 correspondence from the United States Veterans Administration; birth certificate; marriage
18.16 certificate; proof of enrollment at an eligible institution; signed affidavits; proof of residency;
18.17 proof of identity; or any other official documentation the commissioner considers necessary
18.18 to determine eligibility.
- 18.19 (d) The commissioner may deny eligibility or terminate benefits under this section to
18.20 any person who has not provided sufficient documentation to determine eligibility for the
18.21 program. An applicant may appeal the commissioner's eligibility determination or termination
18.22 of benefits in writing to the commissioner at any time. The commissioner must rule on any
18.23 application or appeal within 30 days of receipt of all documentation that the commissioner
18.24 requires. The decision of the commissioner regarding an appeal is final. However, an
18.25 applicant whose appeal of an eligibility determination has been rejected by the commissioner
18.26 may submit an additional appeal of that determination in writing to the commissioner at
18.27 any time that the applicant is able to provide substantively significant additional information
18.28 regarding the applicant's eligibility for the program. An approval of an applicant's eligibility
18.29 by the commissioner following an appeal by the applicant is not retroactively effective for
18.30 more than one year or the semester of the person's original application, whichever is later.
- 18.31 (e) Upon receiving an application with insufficient documentation to determine eligibility,
18.32 the commissioner must notify the applicant within 30 days of receipt of the application that

19.1 the application is being suspended pending receipt by the commissioner of sufficient
 19.2 documentation from the applicant to determine eligibility.

19.3 **Sec. 12. [197.989] GOLD STAR AND BLUE STAR FAMILIES; MEMORIAL**
 19.4 **PLAQUE.**

19.5 **Subdivision 1. Purpose.** The state of Minnesota wishes to honor and recognize the
 19.6 service and sacrifices of Gold Star and Blue Star families.

19.7 **Subd. 2. Memorial plaque.** The commissioner of administration shall place a memorial
 19.8 plaque in the court of honor on State Capitol grounds to recognize the service and sacrifices
 19.9 of Minnesota's Gold Star and Blue Star families. The Capitol Area Architectural and Planning
 19.10 Board must solicit design submissions from the public. The Capitol Area Architectural and
 19.11 Planning Board shall select a design from the submitted designs to use as a basis for final
 19.12 production. The selected design must be approved by the commissioner of veterans affairs
 19.13 and must be furnished by the person or group who submitted the design at no cost to the
 19.14 state of Minnesota.

19.15 **Sec. 13. ADVISORY TASK FORCE ESTABLISHED; VETERANS OF SECRET**
 19.16 **GUERRILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS.**

19.17 **Subdivision 1. Establishment; membership.** (a) The commissioner of veterans affairs
 19.18 must establish a Veterans of Secret Guerilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory
 19.19 Task Force.

19.20 (b) The advisory task force must consist of the commissioner, or a designee, and the
 19.21 following additional 12 members appointed by the commissioner, except as otherwise
 19.22 provided:

19.23 (1) a representative of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, appointed by
 19.24 the United States Commissioner of Veterans Affairs;

19.25 (2) a representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the
 19.26 Commanders Task Force;

19.27 (3) a representative of the Disabled American Veterans of Minnesota;

19.28 (4) a United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during
 19.29 the Vietnam War;

19.30 (5) a Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces;

19.31 (6) a veteran of a secret guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos;

20.1 (7) a historian knowledgeable about the secret guerilla units and irregular forces in Laos;

20.2 (8) a representative of the Minnesota Military Museum who has knowledge of the
 20.3 Vietnam War designated by the museum's director; and

20.4 (9) four legislators, with one member each appointed by the speaker of the house of
 20.5 representatives, the house DFL leader, the senate majority leader, and the senate minority
 20.6 leader.

20.7 Subd. 2. **Duties; report.** (a) The task force must:

20.8 (1) establish criteria for determining which Minnesotans served in the secret guerrilla
 20.9 units or with irregular forces in Laos; and

20.10 (2) establish criteria and a protocol to determine which Minnesotans who served in the
 20.11 secret guerilla units or with irregular forces in Laos are deserving of the benefits of a veteran
 20.12 under Minnesota law and which veterans benefits should be extended to these Minnesotans.

20.13 (b) The task force must prepare a report to the legislature that includes the findings,
 20.14 criteria, protocol, and recommendations required under paragraph (a). The commissioner
 20.15 must deliver the report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative
 20.16 committees with jurisdiction over veterans affairs policy and finance by February 15, 2026.

20.17 Subd. 3. **Administration; terms of membership.** The commissioner shall convene the
 20.18 first meeting of the advisory task force by August 15, 2025, and provide staff support to
 20.19 the advisory task force. Minnesota Statutes, section 15.059, subdivision 6, governs the terms
 20.20 and removal of members of the advisory task force. Members of the task force serve without
 20.21 compensation or per diem.

20.22 Subd. 4. **Expiration.** The task force expires February 15, 2026."

20.23 Delete the title and insert:

20.24 "A bill for an act

20.25 relating to state government; establishing a budget for the Department of Military
 20.26 Affairs and the Department of Veterans Affairs; requiring the commissioner of
 20.27 administration to place a memorial plaque honoring Gold Star and Blue Star
 20.28 families on State Capitol grounds; establishing a Veterans of Secret Guerilla Units
 20.29 and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force; requiring reports; transferring
 20.30 money; appropriating money; amending Minnesota Statutes 2024, sections 13.461,
 20.31 subdivision 27; 192.49, subdivisions 1, 2, by adding a subdivision; 193.143;
 20.32 197.065; 197.236, subdivisions 8, 9; 197.75, subdivision 1; 197.791, subdivision
 20.33 4; proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 197."

20.34 With the recommendation that when so amended the bill be placed on the General
 20.35 Register.

21.1 This Committee action taken April 24, 2025

21.2 Co-Chair

21.3 Co-Chair