



FLORIDA TAXWATCH CELEBRATES VETERANS DAY

A LOOK AT WHAT FLORIDA HAS DONE TO BECOME THE MOST VETERAN-FRIENDLY STATE IN THE U.S.

Florida has the third largest military veteran population in the nation.

There are more than 1.6 million vets living in the Sunshine State, nearly 1 in every 12 adult Floridians; and 250,000 disabled veterans, also the third largest number nationally. There are more World War II vets in Florida than in any other state, and almost half of our veterans are over 65 years of age.

Last year, the Legislature passed a Florida "G.I. Bill" with the goal of making Florida the most "veteran friendly" state in the nation. In addition to some of the benefits described below, the bill creates Florida Is For Veterans, Inc. to promote Florida to retired and recently separated military service members.

Florida is justifiably proud of our veterans. As a small token of the state's appreciation for their service, over the years the Legislature and the people of Florida have created a number of tax and other benefits for veterans and active duty military men and women.

PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTIONS

Disabled Veterans – A veteran with at least a 10% service-connected disability may be entitled to a \$5,000 exemption on any property he or she owns.

Service-Connected, Total and Permanent Disability, or Confined to a Wheelchair – These veterans may qualify for total exemption of their homestead. This benefit can carry over to the surviving spouse.

Elderly Disabled Veterans – A veteran who is disabled, 65 or older, and owns homestead property may qualify for a property tax discount based on their percentage of disability.

Deployed Military Exemption – A member or former member of the military, the reserves, Coast Guard, or the Florida National Guard may receive an exemption for his or her homestead if deployed during the last calendar year outside the United States. The exemption is equal to the percentage of the year the person was deployed.

Fallen Heroes Family Tax Relief Act – A surviving spouse of a veteran (and first responders) who died from service-connected causes may be granted a total exemption on their home.

Retention of Homestead Exemption – A person serving in the Armed Forces may rent the homestead without abandoning the claim to the homestead exemption.

PROFESSIONAL LICENSE FEES

The fees related to licensing for professions licensed by the Department of Professional Regulation and the Department of Health may be waived for veterans who have been honorably discharged within 60 months prior to applying for licensure. Spouses also qualify for the waiver. Also, members of the military, their spouses, and veterans who have retired within 24 months who apply for licensure in the insurance industry are exempt from the application filing fee.

EDUCATION

The “Congressman C.W. ‘Bill’ Young Veteran Tuition Waiver Program” waives out-of-state fees for honorably discharged veterans that attend a state college, state university, career center, or charter technical career center. In addition, \$1.5 million is provided annually to fund tuition scholarships and book stipends for Florida National Guard members that participate in Educational Dollars for Duty, which is the Florida National Guard’s education assistance program.

Florida also waives undergraduate-level tuition at state universities and community colleges for Florida recipients of the Purple Heart and other combat-related decorations.

Tuition benefits are also provided for dependent children and spouses of deceased or totally disabled veterans and children of service members that are missing in action or prisoners of war.

DRIVERS LICENSES

Florida law grants members of the military who are on active duty outside this state, and their dependents, an automatic extension on their driver licenses without reexamination.

Non-resident active duty military service members stationed in Florida are exempt from the requirement to obtain a Florida driver license when his or her children enter a Florida public school. The service member’s spouse is also exempt if the spouse begins employment or enrolls in school in the state.

EMPLOYMENT

All government employers in Florida are required to grant employment preference in hiring and retention to veterans, spouses, parents and legal guardians, as well as National Guard members and United States Reserve Forces. Private sector employers are authorized, but not required, to establish a veterans’ preference process for honorably discharged veterans and certain spouses.

The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity offers a range of services to veterans including recruitment services, training grants, and links to federal programs offering certain employer incentives for hiring veterans. The Hiring Florida’s Heroes initiative works with employers to connect them with veterans possessing needed skills.

The newly created Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) program will help connect veterans and employers, and will contract with at least one university to administer entrepreneurship initiative programs for veterans. It will also create a grant program for businesses to provide funding for training veterans to meet a business’s workforce-skill needs.