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CONTACT: Anthony Langone, *Rep. Haggerty*
(617) 722-2090

Mason Heilman, *Rep. Ciccolo*
(617) 722-2210

House Passes Legislation to Support and Honor Veterans

*Increases access to mental health services at public colleges and universities,
recognizes historic contributions of female veterans from Massachusetts*

BOSTON – Yesterday, days before the nation celebrates Veterans Day on November 11, **Representative Richard M. Haggerty (D-Woburn)** and **Representative Michelle Ciccolo (D-Lexington)**, along with their colleagues in the House of Representatives, voted to unanimously pass two pieces of legislation, which would improve mental health care for student veterans and honor the military service contributions of a female American Revolutionary War soldier.

The first bill establishes a continuing education program – administered by the University of Massachusetts Medical School – to train public higher education counselors to recognize the symptoms of conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and to familiarize them with available resources for treatment for veterans attending state colleges and universities. The legislation aims to provide the necessary training for both clinical and non-clinical counselors working to support the unique needs of the more than 2,500 veteran students attending the commonwealth’s 29 public institutions of higher learning.

The second bill provides for a 15 member commission to design a memorial in honor of Deborah Sampson, who disguised herself as a man in order to serve in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. The commission will consist of legislators, the Secretary of the Department of Veterans’ Services, the Adjutant General of the Commonwealth, and representatives of veteran organizations.

“As our veterans transition from military to civilian life, it important that counselors are familiar and prepared to meet the challenges they face every single day. This bill will improve mental health care at our state institutions and ensure counselors are properly trained to aid those affected by conditions such as PTSD, providing the necessary care our Commonwealth’s veterans both need and deserve,” said **Representative Haggerty**. “We also honor our female service members past and present through the commissioning of this memorial, recognizing the service of one of our nation’s great patriots, Deborah Sampson.”

In 1782, Sampson used the name Robert Shurtleff to join the elite Fourth Massachusetts Infantry Regiment led by Captain George Webb at West Point, NY. Over the following year and a half, she participated in dangerous scouting missions, led a raid that brought about the capture of 15 Tory men, and stormed a British fort during the Siege of Yorktown.

Over the course of her service, Sampson sustained injuries including a forehead gash from a sword and a gunshot wound to the thigh. For the latter, she removed the bullet herself to avoid detection as a woman. When she later fell seriously ill and was hospitalized, her identity was discovered. On October 23, 1783, she received an honorable discharge and was the only woman to receive a full military pension for her service in the Continental Army. John Hancock and Paul Revere assisted her in obtaining her military pension, and General John Patterson selected her as his aide de camp due to her bravery and leadership. Sampson is the official state heroine of Massachusetts.

“When Deborah Sampson bravely donned her disguise and enlisted to serve her country seven years after the ‘Shot Heard Round the World’ at the Battle of Lexington and Concord, she could hardly have imagined that even 236 years later, women would still struggle for their voices to be heard in the nation she fought for,” said **Representative Ciccolo**. “Deborah was the first of many brave Americans who, due to their gender, their race, their sexual orientation, or their gender identity, had to inexplicably fight for the privilege and honor of serving the country we all love. She set an example, and it is up to us to continue honoring those who serve by pushing to allow everyone to do so openly and with pride, and providing them with the quality education and mental health care services they need and deserve when they come home.”

The two bills build on the House’s longstanding support for veterans, with Massachusetts’ benefits and services often ranked as first in the nation. Most recently, the General Court passed the BRAVE Act as well as legislation to assist veterans with funeral and burial expenses and property taxes.

The bills will now go to the Senate.

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