

## House Republican Press Release

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Press Office: 860-240-8700

### Belden Votes to Protect Members of the Armed Forces



*Bill Passed by House Addresses Discrimination Against Service Members, Unauthorized Use of Uniform*

HARTFORD – State Representative Dick Belden (R-113) today voted in favor of a measure that establishes criminal penalties and increases civil penalties for people who discriminate against armed forces members based on that membership. It also increases the penalty for the unauthorized wearing of military clothing, and makes it a crime to falsely claim to be a recipient of a Congressional or any other service medal awarded to members of the armed forces.

Under current state law, anyone who is discriminated against or deprived their rights due to their membership in a branch of the armed forces is entitled to double damages in court proceedings. Under provisions of the bill, criminal penalties are established from \$500 to \$1000, imprisonment for at least six months, or both for a violation. It also increases the civil award to up to \$1000 or triple damages, whichever is more, as well as attorneys' fees.

The bill also increases the fine for wearing the military uniform of any of the armed forces without authorization. The bill raises the fines from \$100-\$500 up to \$500-\$1000, and retains potential imprisonment for up to six months.

Someone falsely claiming to be a recipient of a Congressional award, decoration, or medal, or service medal or badge awarded by the armed forces, or wears such medals when unauthorized to do so would be punished by a fine between \$500 and \$1000, and could be imprisoned for up to six months.

“This bill seeks to protect the rights of those who serve us in uniform and protect our rights,” said Belden, who served in the United States Air Force from 1955-1961. “Those who would either deny rights to members of the armed forces, or pretend to possess military awards and distinctions, or wear their uniform without authorization will now face more serious consequences.”

The bill, HB 6948, *An Act Concerning Stolen Military Valor and Discrimination Against Members of the Armed Forces*, now heads to the State Senate for action there. This session of the Connecticut General Assembly adjourns at midnight, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007.