

FY 2025 BUDGET RECOMMENDATION BUDGET BRIEF

Maura T. Healey, Governor | Kimberley Driscoll, Lt. Governor



Serving Our Veterans

Laura Taronas, Fiscal Policy Manager

Veterans Services in Massachusetts

The Healey-Driscoll Administration continues to provide quality support to our veterans and their families, paying the debt owed to the state's service members through the House 2 budget recommendation. House 2 recommends funding EOVS at \$194 M.

The Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) serves Massachusetts veterans and their families with the following mission objectives:

- Operating the Veterans Homes in Chelsea and Holyoke
- Administering a needs-based benefits program through municipal veteran service officers
- Funding annuity benefits to eligible disabled veterans, Gold Star parents, widows, and spouses
- Providing resources to organizations offering veterans' homelessness and supportive services
- Supporting veterans with educational, employment, and peer support services
- Acting as a liaison for those veterans seeking federal assistance through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- Operating two veterans' cemeteries in Agawam and Winchendon

As the Healey-Driscoll Administration invests in the administrative infrastructure to create the new Executive Office, EOVS has begun to transform the way the state engages with veterans, notably through the improvement of services at both Massachusetts Veterans Homes, undergoing robust outreach efforts, and by the introduction of transformative legislation devoted to veteran welfare.

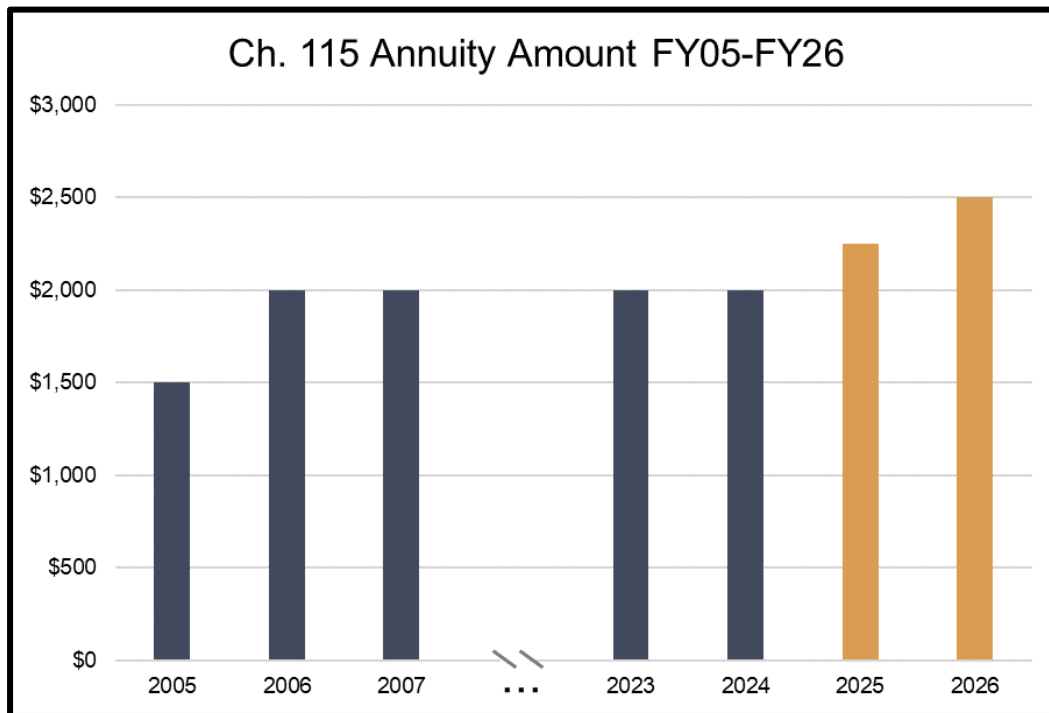
HERO Act

In November 2023, the Healey-Driscoll Administration filed *An Act Honoring, Empowering and Recognizing Our Servicemembers and Veterans (HERO Act)*, which expands veteran benefits and promotes equity and inclusion. The HERO Act is the most comprehensive piece of legislation devoted to the welfare of the veteran population offered by a Massachusetts Governor in almost two decades.

The Governor's House 2 budget provides funding for several key provisions of the HERO Act, including \$4.3 million to increase the Chapter 115 disabled veterans' annuity payment from \$2,000 to \$2,250 per person per month. These annuities support disabled veterans, parents of

Budget Brief: Serving Our Veterans

a deceased veteran, and the unmarried spouses of deceased veterans to help pay for daily living expenses and other necessities. Under the HERO Act, the annuity would further increase to \$2,500 in FY26.



Note: FY25 and FY26 amounts based on the HERO Act.

The bill also proposes eliminating fees on specialty veteran license plates. Recipients of specialty veteran license plates may instead pay a voluntary donation to benefit Chelsea and Holyoke Veterans Homes residents.

The HERO Act also includes several provisions that do not require additional funding, including:

- Expanding veteran access to behavioral health treatment and the Active-Duty Buyback program
- Broadening the definitions of “veteran” and “veteran dependent” to allow for expanded benefit eligibility
 - This change also implements IVF reimbursement for same-sex couples that have been denied reimbursement by the federal Department of Veterans Affairs
- Increasing the Vet-Hire tax credit to \$2,500 for small businesses that hire unemployed or low-income veterans
- Ensuring that a cost-of-living adjustment in Social Security benefits will not affect eligibility to receive Ch. 115 benefits

Massachusetts Veterans Homes at Chelsea and Holyoke

Our veterans deserve access to high quality long-term care. Not only do the Veterans Homes provide crucial services that meet their residents' physical and mental needs, but they also foster a sense of community among those who have served our country.

House 2 recommends \$53.6 million for the Veterans Home at Chelsea and \$34.6 million for the Veterans Home at Holyoke. This supports inflation and direct care payroll costs to ensure proper staffing ratios and top-tier care at the Homes. In addition to the state funding allocated to the Homes, Chelsea and Holyoke have received a total of \$24.1 million in federal ARPA funds that will be used to deliver improvements at the Homes and increase veteran access to long-term care.

The Veterans Homes at Chelsea and Holyoke are also investing in serving the state's veterans by replacing the outdated long-term care centers with modern, community-oriented facilities. These projects are financed through the Capital Investment Plan (CIP) and with contributions from the federal government. The CIP also provides \$6.5 million in funding from FY24 to FY28 to implement electronic medical records systems to help modernize and improve patient care at the Homes.

Massachusetts Veterans Home at Chelsea (CHE)

In October 2023, Chelsea opened its new long-term care facility, which replaced the 136-bed Quigley Building. The \$200 million new long-term care facility has received funding in the Capital Investment Plan for the past several years and is partially reimbursed by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The new facility allows Chelsea to increase its long-term care capacity, which includes skilled nursing beds, long-term care beds, and dementia units. The new facility is roughly 80,000 square feet larger than the ward-style Quigley Building.



Figure 2: US Senator Elizabeth Warren, Governor Maura Healey, and Veterans' Secretary Jon Santiago participate in the ribbon cutting ceremony at the new Veterans Home in Chelsea's long-term care facility

Budget Brief: Serving Our Veterans

The new facility at Chelsea provides 154 long-term care beds for veterans, all with private bedrooms and bathrooms, in 14-bed units that have a community living room, dining room, and kitchen. The new facility is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Certified by the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) for long term care.

Massachusetts Veterans Home at Holyoke (HLY)

In August 2023, Holyoke broke ground on its new long-term care facility, which is expected to open in Fall 2028. This project will construct a new 350,000 sq. ft. long-term healthcare facility for 234 veterans that will replace the existing Holyoke Veterans Home. The new facility will include gardens, physical therapy facilities, a dental suite, hair salon, dining and social spaces, and the replacement of the existing site infrastructure.



Figure 3: Breaking ground on the new Holyoke long-term care facility

The Holyoke Veterans Home entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, committing \$263.5 million in federal funding for new construction at the Holyoke Veterans Home. The state received \$164 million of the grant funding in FY24, with the remainder to be paid out in future fiscal years.



Figure 4 :The new Veterans Home in Holyoke's long-term care facility, scheduled to open Fall 2028