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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO MILITARY AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE -- DECORATIONS

Introduced By: Senators Felag, Appollonio, Lauria, Gallo, Burke, LaMountain, and Britto

Date Introduced: January 16, 2026

Referred To: Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1           SECTION 1. Chapter 30-8 of the General Laws entitled "Decorations" is hereby amended  
2   by adding thereto the following section:

3           **30-8-11. Rhode Island orange heart medal.**

4           (a) The Rhode Island orange heart medal may be awarded, in the name of the governor, to  
5   any person who, while serving as a commissioned officer, warrant officer, or enlisted person of the  
6   armed forces of the United States, including the reserve components thereof, or of the Rhode Island  
7   national guard while on active state or federal service, meets the criteria described in subsection (b)  
8   of this section.

9           (b) To be eligible for the Rhode Island orange heart medal, a service member shall meet  
10   all of the following conditions:

11           (1) Be a current or former resident of Rhode Island;

12           (2) Served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States or Rhode Island national  
13   guard at any time on or after December 6, 1941;

14           (3) During service, the individual had documented exposure to:

15           (i) Herbicides used in military operations including, but not limited to, Agent Orange;

16           (ii) Open-air burn pits or similar waste disposal or combustion operations used during  
17   military deployments; or

18           (iii) Other chemical, biological, or radiological agents or materials associated with military  
19   operations and recognized by federal or state authorities as hazardous;

1           (4) Has been diagnosed with a service-connected illness or condition causally linked to  
2 exposure, materials or agents specified in subsection (b)(3) of this section either as recognized by  
3 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, or as documented in medical records and approved by the  
4 director of the office of veterans' affairs, or designee;

5           (5) Has been discharged with either an honorable discharge or general discharge under  
6 honorable conditions; and

7           (6) Applies for the medal with supporting documentation of eligibility.

8           (c) No more than one Rhode Island orange heart medal shall be awarded to any one person;  
9 however, for each additional condition verified to be caused by toxic exposure meeting the  
10 eligibility criteria, the recipient may receive a bronze oak leaf cluster in lieu of a second medal.

11           (1) The medal shall bear the words: "Rhode Island Orange Heart Medal -- For Toxic  
12 Exposure Service" and may incorporate design elements reflecting toxic exposure recognition as  
13 approved in accordance with the provisions of § 30-8-6.

14           (2) The medal may be presented at a formal ceremony or delivered to the recipient by the  
15 director of the office of veterans' affairs, or designee.

16           (e) The director of the office of veterans' affairs, or designee, shall maintain a registry of  
17 all recipients and promulgate regulations pursuant to the provisions of § 30-17.1-6(b) for the  
18 administration, application process, and documentation requirements for the medal.

19           (f) All costs for designing, producing, distributing, and administering the award of the  
20 Rhode Island orange heart medal shall be subject to appropriation by the general assembly.

21           SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION  
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
OF  
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- 1           This would establish the Rhode Island orange heart medal to formally recognize Rhode  
2   Island veterans whose service exposed them to toxic herbicides, burn pits, or other hazardous  
3   agents.  
4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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