VETERANS OF SPECIAL GUERILLA UNITS AND IRREGULAR FORCES IN LAOS

Advisory Task Force

Report to the Minnesota Legislature

February 15, 2026

Minnesota Session Law – 2025, Regular Session
Chapter 30, SF Number 1959, Article 2, Sec. 6

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MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
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February 15, 2026

Minn. Laws 2025, Chapter 30 created a new section of state statute recognizing Veterans of the Secret War in Laos who served with special guerilla units (SGU) or other irregular forces. The new sections of law establish the definition of a Veteran of the Secret War in Laos and makes these Veterans eligible for specific State Veterans benefits.

This newly enacted Veteran status provides a limited number of State benefits, as follows:

- Veteran designation on Minnesota drivers' licenses and Minnesota ID cards
- Honor Guards from Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organizations can be reimbursed by MDVA for providing services at the funeral of a deceased Veteran
- Burial privileges at State Veterans Cemeteries
- Permanent grave markers purchased by MDVA and distributed through County Veterans Service Offices or Veterans Service Organizations
- Veterans Preference in hiring and promotion for public employment; a permissive preference applies to non-public employment.
- Free copies of vital records for the Veteran, surviving spouse, or next of kin
- Limited exemption from expiration dates for renewal of professional licenses, motor vehicle registration and drivers' licenses
- Eligibility for the Honor and Remember flag

Eligibility criterion:

First Criterion: Minnesota residents who were naturalized under the Federal Hmong Veterans' Naturalization Act of 2000 became eligible for benefits effective August 1, 2025.

Second Criterion: Minnesota law directed the creation of the Veterans of the Secret Guerrilla Units and Irregular Forces in Laos Advisory Task Force. The Task Force began work in September 2025 and was charged with developing recommendations to the Minnesota Legislature regarding eligibility criteria and verification protocols for the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs to determine Veteran status for individuals who claim to have served in the Secret War in Laos with a SGU or other irregular forces.

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In my role as Commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs, I appointed nine members of the Advisory Task Force. The other four were appointed by the leader of each Caucus of the Minnesota Legislature.

ADVISORY TASK FORCE MEMBERS

MDVA Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson - The Minnesota Department of Veteran Affairs Commissioner, or a designee

Mr. Trent Dilks (DAV of MN) - A representative of the Minnesota Commanders Task Force designated by the Commanders Task Force

Mr. Bill Strusinski - A United States armed forces veteran who served on active duty in Vietnam during the Vietnam War

Mr. Tou T. Yang - A Hmong American Minnesota resident who served in the United States armed forces

Mr. Gia T. Lee - A veteran of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos

Mr. Tong Vang - A veteran of a special guerilla unit or irregular forces in Laos

Mr. Scott Walker - A member with expertise in the history of allied irregular and surrogate forces

Mr. William F. Roleau - A member with direct experience in United States intelligence or special operations in Southeast Asia

Mr. Stephen (Tim) Kirk - A member with direct experience in Military Assistance Command Vietnam Special Forces operations

Rep. Ethan Cha - A member appointed by the MN House Democratic-Farmer-Labor leader

Rep. Bidal Duran - A member appointed by the Speaker of the MN House of Representatives

Sen. Jeff Howe - A member appointed by the MN Senate Minority Leader

Sen. Susan Pha - A member appointed by the MN Senate Majority Leader

The Advisory Task Force met eight times in a hybrid format:

Meeting # 1 – September 30th, 2025
Meeting # 2 – October 20th, 2025
Meeting # 3 – October 27th, 2025
Meeting # 4 – November 13th, 2025
Meeting # 5 – November 24th, 2025
Meeting # 6 – December 10th, 2025
Meeting # 7 - December 19th, 2025
Meeting # 8 - January 15th, 2026

In the first meeting, Senator Susan Pha was elected Chair of the Advisory Task Force and Minnesota

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Department of Veterans Affairs Deputy Commissioner Ben Johnson was elected Vice Chair.

Over the course of these meetings, the Task Force members worked to develop recommended eligibility criteria and verification protocols, informed by briefings from department staff, outside subject-matter experts, Veterans of the Secret War in Laos, and representatives from the National Cemetery Administration.

The following pages of this report include recommended technical changes from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs relating to the enabling Session Law, the Advisory Task Force's recommendations, detailed meeting summaries, and other supporting materials.

These recommendations are not final. Any changes must be enacted through the Legislative process and signed by the Governor. Once enacted, Veterans of the Secret War in Laos who meet the established criteria will be eligible to access the identified benefits and privileges.

The department stands ready to work with the Minnesota Legislature during the 2026 Legislative Session to provide additional information on the activities and recommendations of the Task Force, to support the development and enactment of updates and changes.

Respectfully,

Bradley S. Lindsay
Commissioner
Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs

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1. Technical change recommendations from the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs relating to the enabling Session Law

After final enactment and prior to the start of the Task Force, the department began the work of implementation. Through analysis and collaboration with other agencies including the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, the MDVA identified four areas of the enabling legislation that should be updated in any bill that updates the session law to include new protocols and eligibility criteria.

Recommendations:

- Inclusion of a burial fee reference to Minnesota Statutes § 197.236, Subd 9 (State Veterans Cemeteries).

- Update Veteran's Preference benefits to include Minnesota Statutes §§ 43A.09 (Recruitment), 43A.11 (Veterans Preference), 43A.111 (Noncompetitive Appointment of Certain Disabled Veterans [Veterans Preference for Minnesota State Agency Hiring]), 197.46 (Veterans Preference Act; Removal Forbidden; Right of Mandamus), 197.48 (Application [no local ordinance can supersede the Veterans Preference Act]), and 197.481 (Enforcement of Veterans Preference through MDVA Commissioner).

- Remove reference to Minnesota Statutes § 197.65 (Renewal of Professional License, Motor Vehicle Registration, and Driver's License). Provisions apply to persons serving in or having recently been separated or discharged from active military service. Veterans of the Secret War in Laos do not fall under these categories of service-member.

- Remove reference to Minnesota Statutes § 197.987 (Honor and Remember Flag).

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2. The Advisory Task Force's recommendations

Draft Protocol & Eligibility Criteria Language:

Eligibility for State Veterans Benefits and Privileges Protocol – Veterans of the Secret War in Laos
This protocol establishes procedures for determining eligibility for state veterans benefits and privileges for Veterans of the Secret War in Laos.

Eligibility for benefits under this section require the applicant to pre-file for burial with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration. The applicant must complete VA Form VA40-10007, "Application for Pre-Need Determination of Eligibility for Burial in a VA National Cemetery." The registration number will be used by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to retrieve the applicant's naturalization records for determination by the Federal VA.

Minnesota County Veteran Service Officers or the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs must assist applicants in completing VA Form VA40-10007. Copies of this form will be available on the department website and at department offices.

After the Federal VA determines eligibility, the applicant must provide a copy of the determination to the department. Upon verification, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs will issue the applicant a Certificate of Eligibility qualifying them for state veterans benefits and privileges.

Special Consideration by the Commissioner
If an applicant does not receive a positive determination from the Federal VA, they may request Special Consideration by the Commissioner Applications for Special Consideration must follow the prescribed process by the Commissioner.

Applicable forms and the submission process will be available on the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs website and in person at the offices of the department.

For Special Consideration, the applicant must submit the following:

(1) the denial notice from the Federal VA, and

(2) at least two different forms of documentation supporting the claim of Veteran status. Acceptable documentation may include:

(1) original service-related documents;

(2) an affidavit from a commissioned officer, non-commissioned officer, or other member of the applicant's chain of command with direct knowledge of the applicant's service;

(3) two affidavits from individuals who served with the applicant in a special guerrilla unit or irregular forces, and have personal knowledge of the applicant's service; or

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(4) other appropriate proof as determined by the Commissioner, including but not limited to:

a. Photographs taken during their service in Laos as SGU members.

b. Newspaper articles (published, written, or digital) featuring or quoting their service as SGU veterans or irregular forces.

c. Certificates of membership from recognized veterans' organizations, such as the Lao-Hmong American Coalition, Lao Veterans of America, SGU Veterans and Families of USA, Inc., Royal Lao Armed Forces and SGU, etc.

d. Congressional recognition certificates.

e. Certificates of training (including from Thailand).

f. Letters of commendation.

g. Additional affidavit from either a U.S. Intelligence Case Officer or someone in the chain of honor.

g. Other relevant supporting documents.

Determination of an applicant's eligibility for special consideration requires the Commissioner to evaluate the authenticity and consistency of all submitted documentation and may also review records maintained by organizations that track SGU or Irregular Force Veterans.

Within 90 days of receiving a completed application and supporting documentation, the Commissioner will issue a determination of eligibility, determination of denial, or request additional information from the applicant. Applications will remain open until a final determination is issued. If the Commissioner determines that the applicant qualifies as a Veteran of the Secret War in Laos, the Commissioner will issue a Certificate of Eligibility recognizing the applicant's status for state veteran benefits and privileges.

Appeals of Special Consideration Determinations

If the Commissioner denies issuance of a Certificate of Eligibility, the applicant may submit a written request for a contested case hearing to challenge the determination of Veteran status. The request must be filed within 60 days from the date of the denial notice and must state the specific reasons for contesting the determination.

Contested case hearings will be conducted in accordance with the procedures established in Minnesota Statutes sections 14.57 through 14.62.

Deadline for Application

Applications for eligibility determinations will be accepted until December 31, 2030.

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