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## **New Legislation Gives Less than Honorably Discharged Veterans a Fighting Chance**

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**SACRAMENTO** – Assembly Bill (AB) 325 authored by Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin (D-Thousand Oaks) was signed by Governor Newsom on Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup>. AB 325 will create the Veteran’s Military Discharge Upgrade Grant Program to fund local service providers working with California veterans to assist them in filing discharge upgrade applications.

“I am grateful to Governor Newsom for signing AB 325,” said **Assemblymember Irwin**. “Veterans have bravely fought for our safety, and it is only fair that we now fight for theirs and provide them with the services and benefits that are owed to them.”

The nature of a veteran’s discharge from their military service branch has an effect on what benefits they may be eligible for based on their service. As a result, a less than honorable discharge deprives veterans from accessing important federal and state benefits resulting in veterans paying higher costs for housing, health care, and education.

Following the 2010 repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” by the Obama Administration, several settlement agreements brought to light the military’s failure to properly consider discharge upgrade applications from veterans who were less than honorably discharged based on their sexual orientation, post-traumatic stress disorder, or a traumatic brain injury. Accordingly, the military agreed to reconsider all less than honorable discharge applications that fall under this criteria, giving veterans an opportunity to petition the nature of their discharge. However, to complete the petition process, veterans must first be aware of the changes in military policy prior to filling out extensive paperwork that can often be a burdensome task.

AB 325 will help bridge these gaps in knowledge and ability for these veterans by funding outreach, education, and filing assistance programs to ensure California veterans can have the nature of their discharge re-evaluated and upgraded in order to access crucial benefits.

*Assemblymember Jacqui Irwin represents California’s 44th Assembly District, which includes the communities of Camarillo, Moorpark, Oak Park, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, Thousand Oaks, and Westlake Village. Visit Assemblymember Irwin’s website: <http://asmdc.org/Irwin>.*

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