

By: Hunter

H.B. No. 2583

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to members and veterans of the armed forces.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Chapter 434, Government Code, is amended by adding Subchapter C to read as follows:

SUBCHAPTER C. TECHNOLOGY SERVICES AND REQUIREMENTS

Sec. 434.101. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

(1) "Commission" means the Texas Veterans Commission.

(2) "TexasOnline" has the meaning assigned by Section 2054.003.

Sec. 434.102. VETERANS WEBSITE. (a) The Department of Information Resources shall establish and maintain on TexasOnline a veterans website. The website must allow veterans to access information on state and federal veterans benefits programs.

(b) A state agency that participates in the veterans website is encouraged to allow a veteran to electronically file for state veterans benefits, including the electronic signing of the filing by the veteran and an electronic acknowledgment of the filing.

(c) The veterans website may allow a veteran to electronically file for selected federal veterans benefits.

Sec. 434.103. COMMISSION FORMS. Commission forms shall contain:

(1) the veterans website address maintained under Section 434.102; and

1 (2) the commission's toll-free telephone number.

2 Sec. 434.104. BENEFITS BOOKLETS. (a) Not later than
3 February 1 of each even-numbered year, the commission shall create
4 an electronic version of a state veterans benefits booklet and
5 provide a printed copy and an electronic version of the booklet to:

6 (1) each veterans county service officer; and

7 (2) the personnel office of each state or federal
8 military installation in this state.

9 (b) A veterans county service officer is encouraged to
10 distribute a copy of the booklet to any person who claims or will
11 claim Texas as a residence after discharge from the United States
12 armed forces.

13 (c) Each veterans county service officer shall make a copy
14 of the booklet available at the county veterans service office.

15 (d) The commission may update the booklet as necessary.

16 (e) The commission shall provide an electronic version of
17 the booklet on the commission's website.

18 Sec. 434.105. ELECTRONIC ACCESS TO NEWSLETTER OR SERVICES.
19 The commission, with the assistance of the executive director of
20 the Department of Information Resources, shall develop and
21 implement a program that uses appropriate computer hardware and
22 software and required training programs to facilitate electronic:

23 (1) delivery of a veterans newsletter; and

24 (2) initiation of veterans benefits claims by veterans
25 county service officers.

26 Sec. 434.106. DONATIONS; COMPUTERS FOR VETERANS COUNTY
27 SERVICE OFFICERS. (a) The commission may accept donated computers

1 from any person, including a governmental entity, and cooperate
2 with that person to establish a program to provide computers at no
3 cost to interested county service officers.

4 (b) A veterans county service officer who obtains a computer
5 under this program shall:

6 (1) make the computer available to veterans at the
7 county office; or

8 (2) lend the computer to veterans in a manner
9 determined by the officer and approved by the county commissioners
10 court.

11 SECTION 2. Subchapter B, Chapter 656, Government Code, is
12 amended by adding Section 656.027 to read as follows:

13 Sec. 656.027. PREFERENCE FOR VETERANS ON STATE EMPLOYMENT
14 FORMS. The commission shall include on all forms relating to state
15 agency employment that are prescribed by the commission under this
16 subchapter or other law a statement regarding the requirement
17 prescribed by Chapter 657 that each state agency have as its goal an
18 agency workforce composed of at least 40 percent veterans.

19 SECTION 3. Subchapter C, Chapter 161, Natural Resources
20 Code, is amended by adding Section 161.075 to read as follows:

21 Sec. 161.075. INFORMATION FOR LENDING INSTITUTIONS. (a)
22 In this section, "lending institution" has the meaning assigned by
23 Section 161.502.

24 (b) On request, the board shall provide to a lending
25 institution information regarding state land and housing benefits
26 programs for veterans in this state.

27 SECTION 4. Sections 434.103 and 656.027, Government Code,

1 as added by this Act, apply only to a form printed on or after the
2 effective date of this Act. A form printed before the effective
3 date of this Act is governed by the law as it existed when the form
4 was printed, and the former law is continued in effect for that
5 purpose.

6 SECTION 5. Not later than September 1, 2004, the Texas
7 Veterans Commission and the executive director of the Department of
8 Information Resources shall develop and implement the initial
9 program required by Section 434.105, Government Code, as added by
10 this Act.

11 SECTION 6. (a) Under the authority granted by Section
12 434.106, Government Code, as added by this Act, the Texas Veterans
13 Commission shall work with the Windham Intermediate School District
14 to establish a program to provide refurbished computers at no cost
15 to interested veterans county service officers.

16 (b) The commission and the district shall jointly determine
17 the quantity of refurbished computers for the program.

18 SECTION 7. (a) The secretary of state shall study the
19 feasibility and cost of establishing procedures to allow a person
20 to cast an electronic ballot if the person is:

21 (1) a member of the armed forces of the United States
22 who is on active duty overseas; or

23 (2) a spouse or dependent of a person described by
24 Subdivision (1) who will be outside the United States on election
25 day and during the early voting period for the election.

26 (b) As part of the study, the secretary of state shall
27 recommend options to:

1 (1) allow the person to request, receive, and send an
2 electronic ballot;

3 (2) verify the voter's identity;

4 (3) ensure the security of the electronic
5 transmission; and

6 (4) meet any other requirements the secretary of state
7 determines necessary.

8 (c) Not later than December 1, 2005, the secretary of state
9 shall submit the study, including the recommendations, to the
10 legislature.

11 SECTION 8. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
12 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as
13 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
14 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
15 Act takes effect September 1, 2003.