

By: Shapleigh

S.B. No. 655

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, as specified by the commission.

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

(1) the veterans website address maintained under

1 Section 434.102; and

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

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

7 (1) each veterans county service officer; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

24 (1) delivery of a veterans newsletter; and

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

27 Sec. 434.106. DONATIONS; COMPUTERS FOR VETERANS COUNTY

1 SERVICE OFFICERS. (a) The commission may accept donated computers  
2 from any person, including a governmental entity, and cooperate  
3 with that person to establish a program to provide computers at no  
4 cost to interested veterans county service officers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 Sec. 161.075. INFORMATION FOR LENDING INSTITUTIONS.

24 (a) In this section, "lending institution" has the meaning  
25 assigned by Section 161.502.

26 (b) On request, the board shall provide to a lending  
27 institution information regarding state land and housing benefits

1 programs for veterans in this state.

2 SECTION 4. Sections 434.103 and 656.027, Government Code,  
3 as added by this Act, apply only to a form printed on or after the  
4 effective date of this Act. A form printed before the effective  
5 date of this Act is governed by the law as it existed when the form  
6 was printed, and the former law is continued in effect for that  
7 purpose.

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

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

18 (b) The Texas Veterans Commission and the Windham School  
19 District shall jointly determine the quantity of refurbished  
20 computers for the program.

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

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

26 (2) a spouse or dependent of a person described by  
27 Subdivision (1) of this subsection who will be outside the United

1 States on election day and during the early voting period for the  
2 election.

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

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

7 (2) verify the voter's identity;

8 (3) ensure the security of the electronic  
9 transmission; and

10 (4) meet any other requirements the secretary of state  
11 determines necessary.

12 (c) Not later than December 1, 2005, the secretary of state  
13 shall submit the study, including the recommendations, to the  
14 legislature.

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