

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1538
By: Van de Putte
Defense & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Many people enlist in the United States Armed Forces so that they may be able to pursue a higher education after their military service. However, once a service member is discharged from the military, they may face many barriers to accessing higher education.

SB 1538 creates veterans resource centers at certain institutions of higher education to rectify the problem.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Veterans Commission in SECTION 1 (Section 434.157, Government Code) of this bill.

ANALYSIS

SB 1538 amends Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding SUBCHAPTER D. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS. It defines "commission," "education regions," and "institution of higher education" and requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to administer a veterans resource center (center) at at least one institution of higher education (institution) in certain specified regions to provide a centralized place for veterans to find assistance and information while enrolled at an institution; deliver innovative, cost-effective programs to attract veterans and family members; enable institutions to create veteran-friendly environments; encourage veterans to take advantage of government educational programs; and assist veterans in applying to public institutions of higher education. It requires TVC to operate 15 veterans resource centers throughout the state with at least one located in certain regions. It further requires each institution that has a veterans resource center to enter into a memorandum of understanding with TVC. Requires that the memorandum of understanding to require the institution to provide and bear the cost of office space that is accessible to disabled persons and complies with any applicable federal and state law, and office equipment, telephone equipment, and service, computer equipment, and Internet access.

SB 1538 requires TVC to employ a program manager to administer the center program and requires the program manager to provide leadership, training, support, and overall management of the center program; evaluate the effectiveness of centers in identifying the services required by veterans to optimize the success of veterans and their families in obtaining a college education and in providing those services; supervise the regional veterans resource counselors; prepare an annual budget; monitor the outcomes of the center program; produce an annual report on veterans' attendance at public institutions of higher education; apply to private organizations and foundations for grant funding or other support that complements the objectives of the program; and perform any other task as required by TVC.

SB 1538 requires TVC to employ a regional veterans resource counselor for each education region to oversee the center or centers located in the region and requires the counselor to maintain an office at a center at an institution located in the region served by the veterans resource counselor; requires each regional resource counselor to visit the institutions located in the education region served by the counselor; work with those institutions to create a hospitable and supportive environment for veterans, enhance awareness of and encourage participation in veterans educational programs and others, develop programs providing ancillary assistance to veterans based on the unique needs of veterans and their families, ensure that veterans

successfully complete their education, and promote the establishment of a student veterans group on each campus in the region. Further the counselor shall work with local, state, and national veterans groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, to promote educational opportunities and benefits to the veteran population in the education region; work with local workforce development boards to ensure that veterans counselors are aware of available nontraditional educational opportunities, including on-the-job training programs and apprenticeships, and advise employers in the region of potential opportunities to create on-the-job training programs for veterans; work with education services officers at military installations to encourage active duty members of the armed forces of the United States and veterans to use federal and state educational benefits; create and manage publicity campaigns in concert with TVC and institutions of higher education in the region to promote the use of education benefits under the federal Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (38 U.S.C. Section 3301 et seq.), the Hazlewood tuition exemption program for veterans and their dependents, and any other education benefit for veterans or their dependents under federal or state law; support programs to assist combat veteran students in readjusting and reintegrating into a noncombat environment; maintain statistical information regarding demographics of veterans assisted, application success, program completion rates, drop-out rates, and reasons for success or failure, as appropriate; and perform other activities, as assigned by TVC, to enhance the educational opportunities of veterans and their family members in the education and throughout the state.

The bill does not make an appropriation. It provides that a provision in the Act that creates a new governmental program, creates a new entitlement, or imposes a new duty on a governmental entity is not mandatory during a fiscal period for which the legislature has not made a specific appropriation to implement the provision.

EFFECTIVE DATE

Upon passage, or, if the Act does not receive the necessary vote, the Act takes effect September 1, 2009.