

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
81R9084 MCK-D

S.B. 1538
By: Van de Putte
Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
3/25/2009
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

The leading reason for enlistment in the United States Armed Forces for service members is to enable them to pursue higher education after their military service. However, once a service member is discharged from the military, they and their families face many barriers to accessing higher education, leading to few veterans completing a college degree. There are many reasons as to why the higher education benefits are not being utilized.

Currently, no state program exists to address the issues in a centralized location that can be accessed by veterans and their families.

This bill creates veterans resource centers (centers) to rectify the problem. The purpose of the centers would be to provide centralized focal points of assistance and information to veterans and their families during their educational experience. The centers would align with the Texas Veterans Commission's commitment to meeting the needs of this unique group of citizens on par across urban, rural, and border areas by delivering innovative, cost-effective programs to attract veterans and family members to attend public colleges and universities in the state; enabling schools to create veteran-friendly environments; encouraging veterans to take advantage of Montgomery GI Bill and Hazlewood Act opportunities; and providing assistance and certain services to veterans and their families throughout their collective educational experience, facilitating the transition of our valiant veterans from military service to the civilian workplace.

As proposed, S.B. 1538 requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to administer a center at at least one institution of higher learning in ten of the higher education regions specified in Section 434.153 (Locations of Centers), Government Code. The bill requires each institution of higher education that has a center to enter into a memorandum of understanding with TVC. The bill requires that the memorandum require that the institution provide and bear the cost of the office space on the campus of the institution of higher education that is disabled-accessible and has office equipment, telephone service, and computer and Internet access. S.B. 1538 requires TVC to employ a program manager, with outlined responsibilities and duties, to administer the center program. The bill requires that TVC also employ regional veterans resource counselors for each education region with certain responsibilities and duties. Finally, the bill authorizes TVC to adopt rules to implement Subchapter D (Veterans Resource Centers).

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

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

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding Subchapter D, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER D. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS

Sec. 434.151. DEFINITIONS. Defines "commission," "education regions," and "institution of higher education."

Sec. 434.152. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS. Requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to administer a veterans resource center (center) at at least one institution of higher education (institution) in each region specified in Section 434.153 to

provides 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 of veterans to attend public institutions; enable institutions to create veteran-friendly environments; and encourage veterans to take advantage of government educational programs.

Sec. 434.153. LOCATIONS OF CENTERS. Requires TVC to operate 15 veterans resource centers throughout the state with at least one veteran resource center located in each of the following higher education regions: High Plains Region, Northwest Texas Region, Metroplex Region, Upper East Texas Region, Southeast Texas Region, Gulf Coast Region, Central Texas Region, South Texas Region, West Texas Region, and Upper Rio Grande Region.

Sec. 434.154. DUTIES OF INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION. Requires each institution that has a veterans resource center to enter into a memorandum of understanding with TVC. Requires that the memorandum of understanding require the institution to provide and bear the cost of office space on the campus of the institution 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.

Sec. 434.155. PROGRAM MANAGER. Requires TVC to employ a program manager to administer the center program. Requires the program manager to:

- (1) provide leadership, training, support, and overall management of the center program;
- (2) 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;
- (3) supervise the regional veterans resource counselors;
- (4) prepare an annual budget;
- (5) monitor the outcomes of the center program; and
- (6) perform any other task as required by TVC.

Sec. 434.156. REGIONAL VETERANS RESOURCE COUNSELORS. (a) Requires TVC to employ a regional veterans resource counselor for each education region to oversee the center or centers located in the region.

(b) Requires a regional veterans resource counselor to maintain an office at a center at an institution located in the region served by the veterans resource counselor.

(c) Requires each regional resource counselor to:

- (1) visit the institutions located in the education region served by the veterans resource counselor;
- (2) work with those institutions to create a hospitable and supportive environment for veterans, enhance awareness of and encourage participation in veterans educational programs and TVC programs providing other services to veterans, including employment and claims assistance services, develop programs providing ancillary assistance to veterans based on the unique needs of veterans and their families, and ensure that veterans successfully complete their education;

(3) 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;

(4) 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;

(5) 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;

(6) create and manage publicity campaigns in concert with TVC and institutions in the education region;

(7) support programs to assist combat veteran students in readjusting and reintegrating into a noncombat environment;

(8) 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

(9) 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.

Sec. 434.157. RULEMAKING AUTHORITY. Authorizes TVC to adopt rules to implement this subchapter.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2009.