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S.B. No. 1538

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to establishing veterans resource centers at certain institutions of higher education.

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

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

SUBCHAPTER D. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS

Sec. 434.151. DEFINITIONS. In this subchapter:

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

(2) "Education regions" means the education regions in this state established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

(3) "Institution of higher education" has the meaning assigned by Section 61.003, Education Code.

Sec. 434.152. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS. The commission shall administer a veterans resource center in at least one institution of higher education in each region specified in Section 434.153 to:

(1) provide a centralized place for veterans to find assistance and information while enrolled at an institution of higher education;

(2) deliver innovative, cost-effective programs to attract veterans and family members of veterans to attend public institutions of higher education;

1 (3) enable institutions of higher education to create
2 veteran-friendly environments;

3 (4) encourage veterans to take advantage of government
4 educational programs; and

5 (5) assist veterans in applying to public institutions
6 of higher education.

7 Sec. 434.153. LOCATIONS OF CENTERS. The commission shall
8 operate 15 veterans resource centers throughout the state with at
9 least one veterans resource center located in each of the following
10 higher education regions:

11 (1) High Plains Region;

12 (2) Northwest Texas Region;

13 (3) Metroplex Region;

14 (4) Upper East Texas Region;

15 (5) Southeast Texas Region;

16 (6) Gulf Coast Region;

17 (7) Central Texas Region;

18 (8) South Texas Region;

19 (9) West Texas Region; and

20 (10) Upper Rio Grande Region.

21 Sec. 434.154. DUTIES OF INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.
22 Each institution of higher education that has a veterans resource
23 center shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the
24 commission. The memorandum of understanding must require the
25 institution of higher education to provide and bear the cost of the
26 following:

27 (1) office space on the campus of the institution of

1 higher education that is accessible to disabled persons and
2 complies with any applicable federal and state law; and

3 (2) office equipment, telephone equipment and
4 service, computer equipment, and Internet access.

5 Sec. 434.155. PROGRAM MANAGER. The commission shall employ
6 a program manager to administer the veterans resource center
7 program. The program manager shall:

8 (1) provide leadership, training, support, and
9 overall management of the veterans resource center program;

10 (2) evaluate the effectiveness of veterans resource
11 centers in identifying the services required by veterans to
12 optimize the success of veterans and their families in obtaining a
13 college education and in providing those services;

14 (3) supervise the regional veterans resource
15 counselors;

16 (4) prepare an annual budget;

17 (5) monitor the outcomes of the veterans resource
18 center program;

19 (6) using data provided by the Texas Higher Education
20 Coordinating Board, produce an annual report on veterans'
21 attendance at public institutions of higher education;

22 (7) apply to private organizations and foundations for
23 grant funding or other support that complements the objectives of
24 the program; and

25 (8) perform any other task as required by the
26 commission.

27 Sec. 434.156. REGIONAL VETERANS RESOURCE COUNSELORS.

1 (a) The commission shall employ a regional veterans resource
2 counselor for each education region to oversee the veterans
3 resource center or centers located in the region.

4 (b) A regional veterans resource counselor shall maintain
5 an office at a veterans resource center at an institution of higher
6 education located in the region served by the veterans resource
7 counselor.

8 (c) Each regional veterans resource counselor shall:

9 (1) visit the institutions of higher education located
10 in the education region served by the veterans resource counselor;

11 (2) work with those institutions of higher education
12 to:

13 (A) create a hospitable and supportive
14 environment for veterans;

15 (B) enhance awareness of and encourage
16 participation in veterans educational programs and commission
17 programs providing other services to veterans, including
18 employment and claims assistance services;

19 (C) develop programs providing ancillary
20 assistance to veterans based on the unique needs of veterans and
21 their families;

22 (D) ensure that veterans successfully complete
23 their education; and

24 (E) promote the establishment of a student
25 veterans group on each campus in the region;

26 (3) work with local, state, and national veterans
27 groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American

1 Legion, to promote educational opportunities and benefits to the
2 veteran population in the education region;

3 (4) work with local workforce development boards to:

4 (A) ensure that veterans counselors are aware of
5 available nontraditional educational opportunities, including
6 on-the-job training programs and apprenticeships; and

7 (B) advise employers in the region of potential
8 opportunities to create on-the-job training programs for veterans;

9 (5) work with education services officers at military
10 installations to encourage active duty members of the armed forces
11 of the United States and veterans to use federal and state
12 educational benefits;

13 (6) create and manage publicity campaigns in concert
14 with the commission and institutions of higher education in the
15 education region to promote the use of education benefits under the
16 federal Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (38
17 U.S.C. Section 3301 et seq.), the Hazlewood tuition exemption
18 program for veterans and their dependents under Section 54.203,
19 Education Code, and any other education benefit for veterans or
20 their dependents under federal or state law;

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

23 (8) maintain statistical information regarding
24 demographics of veterans assisted, application success, program
25 completion rates, drop-out rates, and reasons for success or
26 failure, as appropriate; and

27 (9) perform other activities, as assigned by the

1 commission, to enhance the educational opportunities of veterans
2 and their family members in the education region and throughout the
3 state.

4 Sec. 434.157. RULEMAKING AUTHORITY. The commission may
5 adopt rules to implement this subchapter.

6 SECTION 2. This Act does not make an appropriation. A
7 provision in this Act that creates a new governmental program,
8 creates a new entitlement, or imposes a new duty on a governmental
9 entity is not mandatory during a fiscal period for which the
10 legislature has not made a specific appropriation to implement the
11 provision.

12 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect immediately if it receives
13 a vote of two-thirds of all the members elected to each house, as
14 provided by Section 39, Article III, Texas Constitution. If this
15 Act does not receive the vote necessary for immediate effect, this
16 Act takes effect September 1, 2009.