

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 34
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Defense & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

Texas is home to more than 150,000 women veterans, ranking Texas among the states with the highest number of women veterans in the nation. Interested parties note that many of these women do not take advantage of the services available to veterans because they lack awareness about the services or because the services are tailored to men. To better serve women veterans in Texas, S.B. 34 creates the Texas Women Veterans Program within the Texas Veterans Commission to ensure that women veterans in this state have fair and equitable access to veterans benefits and services. The new program would honor and recognize women veterans as well as assist them.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

ANALYSIS

S.B. 34 amends the Government Code to establish the Texas Women Veterans Program in the Texas Veterans Commission. The bill establishes that the program is attached to the office of the executive director of the commission for administrative purposes and establishes that the mission of the program is to ensure that the women veterans of Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans benefits and services. The bill requires the executive director to designate a women veterans coordinator for Texas. The bill requires the program to provide assistance to the women veterans of Texas as provided by the bill's provisions; perform outreach functions to improve the awareness of women veterans of their eligibility for federal and state veterans benefits and services; assess the needs of women veterans with respect to benefits and services; review programs, research projects, and other initiatives designed to address the needs of the women veterans of Texas; make recommendations to the executive director regarding the improvement of benefits and services to women veterans; and incorporate issues concerning women veterans in commission planning regarding veterans benefits and services.

S.B. 34 requires the Texas Women Veterans Program to advocate for women veterans, work to increase public awareness about the gender-specific needs of women veterans, and recommend legislative initiatives and the development of policies on the local, state, and national levels to address the issues affecting women veterans. The bill requires the program to collaborate with federal, state, and private agencies that provide services to women veterans, and monitor and research issues relating to women veterans. The bill requires the program to disseminate information regarding opportunities for women veterans throughout the network of entities with which the program collaborates. The bill requires the program, through conferences, seminars, and training workshops with federal, state, and private agencies, to provide guidance to a woman veteran who is applying for grants, benefits, or services.

S.B. 34 requires the Texas Women Veterans Program to promote events and activities that recognize and honor the women veterans of Texas and women who serve in the military. The bill

requires the program, to the extent funding is available for that purpose, to provide facilities as appropriate in support of the program. The bill authorizes the executive director, on behalf of the program, to accept and spend funds appropriated to the commission for the operation of the program and received from other sources, including donations and grants. The bill defines "commission," "executive director," "program," and "woman veteran."

EFFECTIVE DATE

On passage, or, if the bill does not receive the necessary vote, September 1, 2011.