

BILL ANALYSIS

S.B. 1796
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Defense & Veterans' Affairs
Committee Report (Unamended)

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

There is concern that current law does not provide for a mechanism for the coordination of services to veterans, servicemembers, and their families. S.B. 1796 seeks to address this concern by amending current law relating to the creation of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services.

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. 1796 amends the Government Code to establish the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services to coordinate the activities of state agencies that assist veterans, servicemembers, and their families; coordinate outreach efforts that ensure that veterans, servicemembers, and their families are made aware of services; and facilitate collaborative relationships among state, federal, and local agencies and private organizations to identify and address issues affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

S.B. 1796 establishes that the council is composed of the executive head, or such person's designated representative, of the Texas Veterans Commission, the Veterans' Land Board, the adjutant general's department, and the Health and Human Services Commission.

S.B. 1796 authorizes the council, by majority vote, to establish the following coordinating workgroups to focus on specific issues affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families: health or mental health, employment, higher education, criminal justice, housing, and any other coordinating workgroup considered necessary. The bill establishes that, if the council votes to establish a coordinating workgroup, the membership of the council also includes certain persons as follows:

- for a health or mental health coordinating workgroup, the executive head, or such person's designated representative, of the Department of State Health Services, the Department of Aging and Disability Services, and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services;
- for an employment coordinating workgroup, the executive head, or such person's designated representative, of the Texas Workforce Commission and the Texas Workforce Investment Council;
- for a higher education coordinating workgroup, the commissioner of higher education, or the commissioner's designated representative;
- for a criminal justice coordinating workgroup, the executive head, or such person's designated representative, of the Texas Correctional Office on Offenders with Medical or Mental Impairments and the Commission on Jail Standards; and

- for a housing coordinating workgroup, the executive head, or such person's designated representative, of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and the Texas Department of Rural Affairs.

The bill authorizes each member of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services to invite one organization or agency that provides services to veterans, servicemembers, and their families, but that is not otherwise a member of the council, to designate a representative to participate in a coordinating workgroup through procedures established by the council.

S.B. 1796 requires the executive director of the Texas Veterans Commission to serve as the presiding officer. The bill requires the council to meet at least annually and at the call of the presiding officer and requires the presiding officer to call the initial meeting of the council not later than November 1, 2011.

S.B. 1796 establishes that the council is administratively attached to the Texas Veterans Commission and authorizes the commission to provide administrative support and resources to the council as necessary to enable the council to perform its duties. The bill requires a state agency represented on the council to support the agency's involvement with the council and provide staff support as needed to the council. The bill provides that the designated representative of any organization or agency that accepts an invitation to serve on a coordinating workgroup of the council is not entitled to compensation, but is entitled to reimbursement of the representative's travel expenses as provided by the Travel Regulations Act and the General Appropriations Act.

S.B. 1796 requires the council, not later than October 1 of each even-numbered year, to submit a report to the governor, lieutenant governor, speaker of the house of representatives, and chairs of the appropriate committees of the legislature detailing the work of the council and any recommendations.

S.B. 1796 specifies that its provisions do not make an appropriation or require a specific appropriation and that any new duty imposed on a state agency as a result of the bill's provisions can be performed through the appropriations provided by the legislature as part of the existing responsibilities of the state agency.

S.B. 1796 defines "council" and provides for the meaning of "servicemember" by reference to the Health and Safety Code.

EFFECTIVE DATE

September 1, 2011.