

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
85R13131 AAF-D

S.B. 1676
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Veteran Affairs & Border Security
4/24/2017
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Veterans county service offices (VCSOs) provide assistance to veterans and their families when applying for and receiving federal and state benefits. As stated in the Veteran Affairs Military Installations Interim Report to the 85th Legislature, VCSOs serve as a "'catch-all' for any question or concern a veteran or their family may have."

Unfortunately, interested parties contend that effectiveness of VCSOs could be strengthened if their statute would be updated. Chapter 434 of the Government Code, the VCSO enabling statute, fails to ensure that VCSOs have a direct line of communication with decision makers at the county level. In some counties, this lack of direction at statute level has led VCSOs to report to individuals or entities who do not have any decision making authority to assist veterans. Additionally, Chapter 434 does not provide that VCSOs must have a separate budget or title within their county, which has led to some VCSOs having limited resources to address the needs of veterans.

In order to address these concerns, S.B. 1676 strives to bridge the gap so that VCSOs report directly to their commissioners court and thus allowing pressing veterans issues to go directly to county leaders. Additionally, S.B. 1676 maximizes the effectiveness of VCSOs by clarifying that VCSOs must have a separate budget, office, and title and allowing VCSOs to have the necessary environment and autonomy needed to focus on assisting veterans.

As proposed, S.B. 1676 amends current law relating to the veterans county service office.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 434.032(a), Government Code, as follows:

- (a) Requires the commissioners court, in a county with a population of 200,000 or more, to maintain a veterans county service office. Requires that the office:
 - (1) have a separate and distinct budget, office, and title from other county offices;
 - (2) be staffed by at least one full-time employee; and
 - (3) report directly to the commissioners court.

Makes nonsubstantive changes.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2017.