

By: Guillen

H.B. No. 2154

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

1 AN ACT
2 relating to required training for veterans county service officers
3 and assistant veterans county service officers.

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

5 SECTION 1. Section 434.007, Government Code, is amended to
6 read as follows:

7 Sec. 434.007. DUTIES. The commission shall:

8 (1) compile federal, state, and local laws enacted to
9 benefit members of the armed forces, veterans, and their families
10 and dependents;

11 (2) collect information relating to services and
12 facilities available to veterans;

13 (3) cooperate with veterans service agencies in the
14 state;

15 (4) inform members and veterans of the armed forces,
16 their families and dependents, and military and civilian
17 authorities about the existence or availability of:

18 (A) educational training and retraining
19 facilities;

20 (B) health, medical, rehabilitation, and housing
21 services and facilities;

22 (C) employment and reemployment services;

23 (D) provisions of federal, state, and local law
24 affording rights, privileges, and benefits to members and veterans

1 of the armed forces and their families and dependents; and

2 (E) other similar, related, or appropriate
3 matters;

4 (5) assist veterans and their families and dependents
5 in presenting, proving, and establishing claims, privileges,
6 rights, and benefits they may have under federal, state, or local
7 law;

8 (6) cooperate with all government and private agencies
9 securing services or benefits to veterans and their families and
10 dependents;

11 (7) investigate, and if possible correct, abuses or
12 exploitation of veterans or their families or dependents, and
13 recommend necessary legislation for full correction;

14 (8) coordinate the services and activities of state
15 departments and divisions having services and resources affecting
16 veterans or their families or dependents;

17 (9) approve a provider of [~~provide~~] training for and
18 certify [~~certification of~~] veterans county service officers and
19 assistant veterans county service officers in accordance with
20 Section [434.038](#);

21 (10) through surveys or other reasonable and accurate
22 methods of estimation, collect and maintain for each county in the
23 state the number of servicemembers and veterans residing in the
24 county and annually update and publish the information on the
25 commission's website; and

26 (11) with the assistance and cooperation of the
27 comptroller, inform and assist veterans and their families and

1 dependents with respect to discovering and initiating claims for
2 unclaimed property held by the United States Department of Veterans
3 Affairs.

4 SECTION 2. Section 434.038, Government Code, is amended to
5 read as follows:

6 Sec. 434.038. TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION. (a) An officer
7 shall, within the time after the date of the officer's appointment
8 that the commission prescribes, complete a course of initial
9 training [~~provided by the Texas Veterans Commission~~]. The
10 commission shall issue the officer a certificate of training after
11 completion of the initial training course. To maintain
12 certification, the officer shall complete continuing training to
13 the extent required by the commission. An officer must maintain
14 certification to remain in office.

15 (a-1) Initial and continuing training required under this
16 section shall be provided by a public or private entity approved by
17 the commission under Subsection (d) [~~The commission shall develop~~
18 ~~and implement methods for providing training to officers. The~~
19 ~~methods may include Internet-based seminars, participation through~~
20 ~~videoconference, cooperation with training provided by the United~~
21 ~~States Department of Veterans Affairs, and other methods as~~
22 ~~appropriate~~].

23 (b) [~~The commission shall provide, at commission expense,~~
24 ~~the initial and continuing training required by this section at~~
25 ~~least once each year.~~

26 [(c)] The commissioners court of an officer's county shall
27 reimburse an officer's travel and lodging expenses incurred in

1 attending [~~commission~~] training required under this section unless
2 state funds are appropriated for that purpose. If state funds are
3 appropriated, the commission shall make the reimbursement in the
4 manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state
5 employees.

6 (c) [~~(d)~~] The commission shall develop [~~standard course~~
7 ~~materials~~] training curriculum[7] and examinations to be used for
8 county service officer certification and United States Department
9 of Veterans Affairs accreditation.

10 (d) [~~(e)~~] The commission shall:

11 (1) maintain [~~course materials and~~] examinations in a
12 central location [~~and provide county service offices and commission~~
13 ~~field staff with access to the course materials on the commission's~~
14 ~~Internet website~~];

15 (2) regularly update [~~course materials~~] training
16 curriculum[7] and examinations after consulting with:

17 (A) the United States Department of Veterans
18 Affairs to ensure the [~~course materials~~] training curriculum[7]
19 and examinations are accurate and meet applicable United States
20 Department of Veterans Affairs requirements; and

21 (B) accredited county service officers to ensure
22 the [~~materials~~] training curriculum[7] and examinations include
23 issues developing at the county level;

24 (3) develop a training handbook containing
25 instruction and case studies addressing:

26 (A) general assistance techniques, including how
27 to provide general information regarding state and federal benefits

1 and referrals for other services and to other agencies, and general
2 information regarding state and federal benefits;

3 (B) basic counseling approaches for assisting
4 veterans, their family members, and other eligible dependents
5 filing benefit claims;

6 (C) basic information on United States
7 Department of Veterans Affairs processes and procedures, including
8 how to accurately complete claims and appeals forms and how to
9 support claims;

10 (D) methods of collecting required documentation
11 and developing claims and appeals;

12 (E) methods of documenting progress and updating
13 a veteran's, a veteran's family member's, or another eligible
14 dependent's case information;

15 (F) methods of assisting veterans, their family
16 members, or other eligible dependents in pursuing appeals,
17 including offering case knowledge in appeals hearings; and

18 (G) methods of representing veterans, their
19 family members, or other eligible dependents during appeals
20 hearings; ~~and~~

21 (4) coordinate with the Department of State Health
22 Services to incorporate a suicide prevention component as part of
23 the accreditation training curriculum and examination; and

24 (5) approve a public or private entity that is
25 accredited by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to
26 provide initial and continuing training required under this
27 section.

1 (e) [~~(f)~~] The commission may establish rules to carry out
2 the purposes of this section, including rules regarding carryover
3 of credit for extra course attendance from one year into subsequent
4 years and the anniversary date by which the continuing
5 certification requirement must be met.

6 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2017.