

By: Lucio

S.B. No. 544

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

relating to required training for veterans county service officers  
and assistant veterans county service officers.

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

SECTION 1. Sections 434.038(a), (b), (c), and (e),  
Government Code, are amended to read as follows:

(a) An officer shall, within the time after the date of the  
officer's appointment that the commission prescribes, complete a  
course of initial training provided by the Texas Veterans  
Commission or approved under Subsection (e)(5). The commission  
shall issue the officer a certificate of training after completion  
of all [the] initial training requirements established by the  
commission under this section [course]. To maintain certification,  
the officer shall complete continuing training [to the extent]  
required by the commission that is approved under Subsection (e)(5)  
or provided by the commission. An officer must maintain  
certification to remain in office.

(b) The commission may [shall] provide, at commission  
expense, the initial and continuing training required by this  
section at least once each year. If state funds are appropriated  
for that purpose, the commission shall reimburse an officer's  
travel and lodging expenses incurred in attending training provided  
by the commission. The commission shall make the reimbursement in  
the manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to

1 state employees.

2 (c) The commissioners court of an officer's county shall  
3 reimburse an officer's travel and lodging expenses incurred in  
4 attending [~~commission~~] training required under this section that is  
5 approved under Subsection (e)(5) [~~unless state funds are~~  
6 ~~appropriated for that purpose. If state funds are appropriated,~~  
7 ~~the commission shall make the reimbursement in the manner~~  
8 ~~prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state~~  
9 ~~employees].~~

10 (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, and examinations after consulting with:

17 (A) the United States Department of Veterans  
18 Affairs to ensure the course materials, training curriculum, and  
19 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, 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 and examination; and

24 (5) approve training provided by public or private  
25 entities to fulfill initial and continuing training requirements  
26 established by the commission under this section.

27 SECTION 2. This Act takes effect September 1, 2017.