

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. Section 434.038, Government Code, is amended by amending Subsections (a), (a-1), (c), and (e) and adding Subsection (a-2) 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~~]. The commission shall issue the officer a certificate of training after completion of the initial training course. To maintain certification, the officer shall complete continuing training to the extent required by the commission. An officer must maintain certification to remain in office.

(a-1) Initial and continuing training required by this section may be provided by:

(1) the commission; or

(2) a public or private entity approved by the commission under Subsection (e).

(a-2) The commission shall develop and implement methods for providing training to officers. The methods may include Internet-based seminars, participation through videoconference, cooperation with training provided by the United States Department

1 of Veterans Affairs, and other methods as appropriate.

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 unless
5 state funds are appropriated for that purpose. If state funds are
6 appropriated, the commission shall make the reimbursement in the
7 manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state
8 employees.

9 (e) The commission shall:

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

14 (2) regularly update course materials, training
15 curriculum, and examinations after consulting with:

16 (A) the United States Department of Veterans
17 Affairs to ensure the course materials, training curriculum, and
18 examinations are accurate and meet applicable United States
19 Department of Veterans Affairs requirements; and

20 (B) accredited county service officers to ensure
21 the materials, training curriculum, and examinations include
22 issues developing at the county level;

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

25 (A) general assistance techniques, including how
26 to provide general information regarding state and federal benefits
27 and referrals for other services and to other agencies, and general

1 information regarding state and federal benefits;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 (5) approve public or private entities to provide the
24 initial and continuing training required by this section.

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