

1-1 By: Lucio S.B. No. 544  
 1-2 (In the Senate - Filed January 19, 2017; February 8, 2017,  
 1-3 read first time and referred to Committee on Veteran Affairs &  
 1-4 Border Security; April 18, 2017, reported adversely, with  
 1-5 favorable Committee Substitute by the following vote: Yeas 6, Nays  
 1-6 0; April 18, 2017, sent to printer.)

1-7 COMMITTEE VOTE

	Yea	Nay	Absent	PNV
1-8				
1-9	X			
1-10	X			
1-11	X			
1-12	X			
1-13	X			
1-14	X			
1-15			X	

1-16 COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR S.B. No. 544 By: Lucio

1-17 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
 1-18 AN ACT

1-19 relating to required training for veterans county service officers  
 1-20 and assistant veterans county service officers.

1-21 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

1-22 SECTION 1. Sections 434.038(a), (b), (c), and (e),  
 1-23 Government Code, are amended to read as follows:

1-24 (a) An officer shall, within the time after the date of the  
 1-25 officer's appointment that the commission prescribes, complete a  
 1-26 course of initial training provided by the Texas Veterans  
 1-27 Commission or approved under Subsection (e)(5). The commission  
 1-28 shall issue the officer a certificate of training after completion  
 1-29 of all [the] initial training requirements established by the  
 1-30 commission under this section [course]. To maintain  
 1-31 certification, the officer shall complete continuing training ~~[to~~  
 1-32 ~~the extent]~~ required by the commission that is approved under  
 1-33 Subsection (e)(5) or provided by the commission. An officer must  
 1-34 maintain certification to remain in office.

1-35 (b) The commission may [shall] provide, at commission  
 1-36 expense, the initial and continuing training required by this  
 1-37 section at least once each year. If state funds are appropriated for  
 1-38 that purpose, the commission shall reimburse an officer's travel  
 1-39 and lodging expenses incurred in attending training provided by the  
 1-40 commission. The commission shall make the reimbursement in the  
 1-41 manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state  
 1-42 employees.

1-43 (c) The commissioners court of an officer's county shall  
 1-44 reimburse an officer's travel and lodging expenses incurred in  
 1-45 attending ~~[commission]~~ training required under this section that is  
 1-46 approved under Subsection (e)(5) [unless state funds are  
 1-47 appropriated for that purpose. If state funds are appropriated,  
 1-48 the commission shall make the reimbursement in the manner  
 1-49 prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state  
 1-50 employees].

1-51 (e) The commission shall:

1-52 (1) maintain course materials and examinations in a  
 1-53 central location and provide county service offices and commission  
 1-54 field staff with access to the course materials on the commission's  
 1-55 Internet website;

1-56 (2) regularly update course materials, training  
 1-57 curriculum, and examinations after consulting with:

1-58 (A) the United States Department of Veterans  
 1-59 Affairs to ensure the course materials, training curriculum, and  
 1-60 examinations are accurate and meet applicable United States

2-1 Department of Veterans Affairs requirements; and  
2-2 (B) accredited county service officers to ensure  
2-3 the materials, training curriculum, and examinations include  
2-4 issues developing at the county level;  
2-5 (3) develop a training handbook containing  
2-6 instruction and case studies addressing:  
2-7 (A) general assistance techniques, including how  
2-8 to provide general information regarding state and federal benefits  
2-9 and referrals for other services and to other agencies, and general  
2-10 information regarding state and federal benefits;  
2-11 (B) basic counseling approaches for assisting  
2-12 veterans, their family members, and other eligible dependents  
2-13 filing benefit claims;  
2-14 (C) basic information on United States  
2-15 Department of Veterans Affairs processes and procedures, including  
2-16 how to accurately complete claims and appeals forms and how to  
2-17 support claims;  
2-18 (D) methods of collecting required documentation  
2-19 and developing claims and appeals;  
2-20 (E) methods of documenting progress and updating  
2-21 a veteran's, a veteran's family member's, or another eligible  
2-22 dependent's case information;  
2-23 (F) methods of assisting veterans, their family  
2-24 members, or other eligible dependents in pursuing appeals,  
2-25 including offering case knowledge in appeals hearings; and  
2-26 (G) methods of representing veterans, their  
2-27 family members, or other eligible dependents during appeals  
2-28 hearings; ~~and~~  
2-29 (4) coordinate with the Department of State Health  
2-30 Services to incorporate a suicide prevention component as part of  
2-31 the accreditation training and examination; and  
2-32 (5) approve training provided by public or private  
2-33 entities to fulfill initial and continuing training requirements  
2-34 established by the commission under this section.

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

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