

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs  
For HB 4923

Compiled on: Thursday, April 20, 2023 3:29 PM

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Hearing Date: April 20, 2023 8:00 AM

James Cunningham, Major (Ret)  
Alamo MOAA and TCVO  
New Braunfels, TX

This bill would provide many resources for veterans and their families. Recommend movement to calendars and the floor for passage.

Denise Gordon  
TX Democratic Veterans Caucus & Self: Clinical Social Worker  
Round Rock, TX

The TX Democratic Veterans Caucus strongly supports HB4923 by Rep Ray Lopez that will facilitate the grant process for those agencies providing community mental health programs for veterans and their families. Any legislation that would assist the provision of Mental Health funding for Veterans and their Families is essential. Please support HB4923 which assists agencies in counties having a population of 100,000 or more by lowering the amount of outside grant funding required to 50%. Community Mental Health Programs need as much State support as possible to function and should not have to spend staff time or salaries on pursuing grants to provide mental health services to our Veterans and their Families who need support. Thank you!

Virginia Simonson, LTC, US Army (Retired)

Self, Retired; Volunteer Peer Specialist

Flower Mound, TX

I'm in support of this bill, to lower the threshold of matching funds required for Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grants and expands the pool of eligible non-profits. But I think it is important for the committee to consider how much "bang for the buck" taxpayers get from these grants. "SB 55, 84th (R), 2015, created the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance (TV+FA) grant program to support communities and to identify & address the mental health needs of veterans/family members through grant-supported projects. There have been five phases of TV+FA grant periods since then that have awarded over \$46 million in state funds to support 74 projects. Through August FY 2021, 51,575 were served - <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/laws-regulations/reports-presentations/2020/hb-1-report-mental-health-veterans-grant-program-dec-2020.pdf>.

Also, an HHSC Report stated – The TEXAS VETERANS + FAMILY ALLIANCE (TV+FA) Grant supports community-based, sustainable, research-informed, and accessible behavioral health services for Texas veterans/families to augment the work of the Veterans Administration." The program had a \$10M budget and served 9,703 Veterans/family members in FY 2022 - <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/idd-bhs-annual-report-fy-2022.pdf> , <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2022-operating-budget.pdf>. In comparison, the Texas Veterans Mental Health Program - Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN), was funded with \$3.55 M in FY 2022 and reported over 90,000 peer support interactions (SMVF Peer Support Groups 1,408 Attended SMVF Peer Support Groups 23,965 One-on-1 Peer Support 31,309 VSO/Community Organization Referrals 28,021 Community Mental Health Referrals 5,390) - <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/mental-health-program-veterans-2022.pdf>. Sadly, reporting protocols don't allow for a true cost comparison or per capita effectiveness analysis. Neither MVPN nor HHSC Grant Program report on outcomes for each individual served. I've served as a volunteer, as a board member, and as a director for various non-profits since 2012. I served as the Chair, Denton County Veterans Advisory Board for several years analyzing gaps in Veterans services and recommending county level solutions. I served as a paid Peer Service Coordinator (PSC), MVPN from June 2014 through August 2020 and as a retired Volunteer peer specialist for MVPN from September 2020 through today. I've had the unique opportunity to see how responsive and how effective Veteran supporting Non-Profits (throughout the DFW area) are to Veterans needs. I also personally witnessed how impactful and life-changing peer provided mental health services can be. My military and civilian training and experience leads me to the conclusion that more emphasis and commensurate funding should be placed on all Veteran Peer Specialist programs, for HHSC Grants as well as for MVPN PSCs and Rural Veteran Counselors.

Keith Simonson, Colonel, US Army, Retired

Texas Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association of America and self

Flower Mound, TX

As the President of the Texas Council of Chapter, Military Officers Association of America, on behalf of our members and myself, I support this bill and appreciate the committee favorably considering it today. Our organization has long been a leader in supporting a strong defense and in recognizing the inherent value of the state's military and Veteran Community. Our members chose three priorities to advocate for during this Legislative Session. One is to support all bills that will improve Mental Health Services & Reduce Suicides among Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families by expanding timely access and availability of services; and by expanding the workforce of trained and certified/licensed Professional Counselors, Clinical Social Workers, General Social Workers, Psychiatrists, and Peer Specialists who are culturally proficient to work with this population. This bill dovetails with our priorities as it has the potential to allow smaller non-profits in underserved areas to support Veterans and their family members. Any state dollars spent on improving the lives of Veterans and family members through effective programs is worth supporting.

Lisa Ramos

Self, registered nurse

San Antonio, TX

As an RN who works in a county hospital, addressing the mental health needs of veterans and their families is essential. Millions upon millions of dollars are paid to military contractors but it's the people on the ground doing the real work and the sacrificing, ie: our troops and veterans, who truly deserve that level of compensation, but who are sadly left by the wayside and not given enough help/services by their own government. HB 4923 is a good step in the right direction of beginning to take better care of our veterans and their families.