

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 2938
By: Menéndez
Veteran Affairs
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Currently, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) identifies veterans at the point of incarceration through the Veterans Affairs Veteran's Reentry Search Service (VRSS). Once a veteran in TDCJ has been identified, they are provided with a Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) brochure and literature about services available to TDCJ-involved veterans while they are incarcerated and for re-entry. These are just one of the many strategies Texas' criminal justice agencies use to support justice-involved veterans. However, there are still gaps in how Texas identifies its veterans, ensures they are connected to resources, and receive assistance in obtaining those resources at no cost.

S.B. 2938 bolsters the existing support that veteran inmates in county jails and TDCJ already receive by:

- Requiring the officer transferring an inmate to TDCJ to be given documentation on the veteran status of the defendant;
- Providing identified veteran inmates with assistance in applying for federal benefits, including mailing necessary documents for those benefits – at no charge to the inmate;
- Requiring county sheriffs to investigate and verify the veteran status of each prisoner during intake and provide them with verification of their veteran status with a prepaid postcard provided by the TVC so the prisoner can request assistance in applying for their benefits;
- Requiring county sheriffs to submit daily reports identifying each veteran prisoner to the TVC, the veterans county service officer for the county and court the prisoner was involved with prior to their incarceration; and
- Allow veteran inmates in county jails to have free in-person or video visitation with either a veterans county service officer or peer service coordinator.

As proposed, S.B. 2938 amends current law relating to the verification of the veteran status of inmates and prisoners.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 8(a), Article 42.09, Code of Criminal Procedure, as follows:

- (a) Requires a county that transfers a defendant to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) under Article 42.09 (Commencement of Sentence; Status During Appeal; Pen Packet) to deliver certain information to an officer designated by TDCJ, including the veteran status of the defendant as determined by an investigation conducted in accordance with Section 511.009(a)(17)(A), Government Code. Makes nonsubstantive changes.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 501.024(b), Government Code, as follows:

(b) Requires TDCJ to take certain actions, including use the data described by Subdivision (1) (relating to requiring TDCJ to investigate and verify the veteran status of each inmate) to assist inmates who are veterans in applying for federal benefits or compensation for which the inmates may be eligible under a program administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, including mailing any related paperwork, application, or other correspondence on behalf of and at no charge to the inmate.

SECTION 3. Amends Section 511.009(a), Government Code, as follows:

(a) Requires the Commission on Jail Standards to:

(1)-(16) makes no changes to these subdivisions;

(17) require the sheriff of each county to:

(A) investigate and verify the veteran status of each prisoner during the intake process by using data made available from the Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) operated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or a similar service;

(B) use the data described by Paragraph (A) to assist prisoners who are veterans in applying for federal benefits or compensation for which the prisoners may be eligible under a program administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, including providing the prisoner on verification of the prisoner's veteran status with a prepaid postcard that is supplied by the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) for purposes of requesting assistance in applying for veterans benefits;

(C) submit a daily report identifying each prisoner whose veteran status was verified under Paragraph (A) during the previous day to TVC and, as applicable, the veterans county service officer for the county and each court in which charges against a prisoner identified in the report are pending; and

(D) allow for a prisoner whose veteran status has been verified under Paragraph (A) to have in-person or video visitation with the veterans county service officer for the county or a peer service coordinator at no cost to the prisoner; and

(18)-(20) makes no changes to these subdivisions.

SECTION 4. Effective date: September 1, 2025.