

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

H.B. 875  
By: Farias  
Corrections  
Committee Report (Unamended)

### **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

Recently enacted legislation requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to verify an inmate's veteran status by using the Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS), which also is used to assist veterans in applying for federal benefits for which they may qualify. However, interested parties contend that these results are returned to TDCJ from the Health and Human Services Commission on a quarterly basis under established federal guidelines and fail to capture the most up-to-date information on veterans located in county jails. In light of these shortcomings, the parties point out a new federal system that would provide real time information and status verification to TDCJ, allowing for the timely identification of incarcerated veterans and for increased access by such veterans to federal benefits. These parties contend that TDCJ, and Texas veterans, would be better served using the new system in place of PARIS. H.B. 875 seeks to address this issue by revising provisions relating to the verification of the veteran status of inmates and prisoners.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IMPACT**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly create a criminal offense, increase the punishment for an existing criminal offense or category of offenses, or change the eligibility of a person for community supervision, parole, or mandatory supervision.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

It is the committee's opinion that this bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, department, agency, or institution.

### **ANALYSIS**

H.B. 875 amends the Government Code to require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to record information relating to an inmate's military history in the inmate's admission sheet and intake screening form, or any other similar document, during the diagnostic process. The bill removes the requirement that TDCJ use data made available from the federal Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS) to investigate and verify the veteran status of each inmate and instead requires TDCJ, in consultation with the Texas Veterans Commission, to investigate and verify the veteran status of each inmate by using the best available federal data. The bill removes the requirement of TDCJ to use PARIS data 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 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and instead requires TDCJ to use the best available federal data for such assistance.

H.B. 875 requires the Commission on Jail Standards to require the sheriff of each county to investigate and verify the veteran status of each prisoner by using data made available from the Veterans Reentry Search Service operated by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or a similar service and to use that data 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 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

**EFFECTIVE DATE**

September 1, 2015.