

**SUBJECT:** Establishing the Texas Women Veterans Program

**COMMITTEE:** Defense and Veterans' Affairs — committee substitute recommended

**VOTE:** 7 ayes — S. King, Frank, Aycock, Blanco, Farias, Schaefer, Shaheen

0 nays

**WITNESSES:** For — Monique Rodriguez, Grace After Fire; Juanelle Bradford, Detra Sneed, Pam Tilley, Valerie James, Texas Women Veterans; Adrienne Evans-Quickley, Acquanetta Pullins, Women's Army Corps Veteran's Association; Judith Dubose; (*Registered, but did not testify*: June Deadrick, CenterPoint Energy; Melissa Mckennon, Grace After Fire; Grace Davis, Hays Caldwell Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse; Bill Kelly, Mental Health America of Greater Houston; David Swain; Laura Austin, Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Josette Saxton, Texans Care for Children; James Cunningham, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations and Texas Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America; LaShondra Jones, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; William West, The American Legion of Texas; Conrad John, Travis County Commissioners Court; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Olie Pope, Veterans County Service Officers Association of Texas; Romana Harrison; Sheena Harsh)

Against — None

On — Edith Disler, Texas Veterans Commission

**BACKGROUND:** Government Code, ch. 434 tasks the Texas Veterans Commission with collecting information and informing members and veterans about available veteran services and facilities, cooperating with veteran service agencies in Texas, and assisting veterans in obtaining local, state, or federal benefits.

Several permanent programs are established under the commission, including education and entrepreneurship programs, but the Women

Veterans Initiative is a temporary program. There are currently more than 190,000 women veterans in Texas, the fastest-growing veteran demographic in the state.

DIGEST:

CSHB 867 would establish the Texas Women Veterans Program in the Texas Veterans Commission. The program's stated mission would be to ensure that women veterans in Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services.

The program would be attached to the office of the executive director for administrative purposes, and the bill would require the executive director to designate a women veterans coordinator for the state.

The duties of the program would include:

- providing assistance to women veterans in Texas;
- performing outreach to improve the awareness of women veterans of their eligibility for federal and state veterans' benefits and services, and public awareness about gender-specific needs;
- assessing the needs of women veterans for benefits and services;
- reviewing programs, research projects, and other initiatives designed to address the needs of women veterans in Texas;
- making recommendations to the executive director about improvement of benefits and services to women veterans;
- incorporating issues concerning women veterans in commission planning regarding veterans' benefits and services; and
- recommending legislative initiatives and development of policies on the local, state, and national levels to address issues affecting women veterans.

The bill would require the program to collaborate with federal, state, county, municipal, and private agencies that provide services to women veterans and share information with them regarding opportunities for women veterans. The bill also would require the program to work with these entities to create conferences, seminars, and training workshops to provide guidance and direction to women veterans who are applying for

grants, benefits, or services.

The bill also would require the program to promote events and activities that recognize and honor women veterans and women who serve in the military and provide facilities in support of the program to the extent funding is available for facilities.

The bill would allow the commission to:

- accept and spend funds on behalf of the program that are either appropriated to the commission to operate the program or are received through other sources, including donations and grants;
- provide matching grants to assist in implementing the program's objectives; and
- participate in the establishment and operation of an affiliated nonprofit organization that raises money or provides services to a program established in the commission, including the Texas Women Veterans Program.

This bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2015.