

SUBJECT: Requiring sheriffs to provide certain services for inmates who are veterans

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 9 ayes — Raymond, Buckley, Biedermann, Cyrier, Gervin-Hawkins,
Lambert, Lopez, E. Morales, Tinderholt

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — Virginia Simonson, North DFW Chapter of the Military Officers Association; Krishnaveni Gundu, Texas Jail Project; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness-Texas; Molly Weiner, United Ways of Texas; Thomas Parkinson)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: LaJohn McDonald Jr., MVPN Veteran Services Tarrant County; April Zamora, Texas Department of Criminal Justice; Blake Harris, Texas Veterans Commission)

BACKGROUND: Concerned parties have noted that while county sheriffs currently are required to verify the veteran status of inmates and assist them in applying for federal veteran benefits, these checks are made inconsistently and many justice-involved veterans cannot afford the cost of postage to mail veteran benefits requests.

DIGEST: HB 1092 would require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to mail any related paperwork, application, or other correspondence on behalf of and at no charge to an inmate applying for federal benefits or compensation under a program administered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for which the inmate may be eligible.

The Commission on Jail Standards would have to require the sheriff of each county to investigate and verify the veteran status of each prisoner during the intake process and to:

- on verification of a prisoner's veteran status, provide the prisoner with a prepaid postcard supplied by the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) for purposes of requesting assistance in applying for veterans benefits;
- submit a daily report identifying each prisoner whose veteran status was verified 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 were pending; and
- allow for a prisoner whose veteran status was verified to have in-person or video visitation with the veterans county service officer for the county or a peer support coordinator at no cost to the prisoner.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2021.