

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
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S.B. 1621  
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations  
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As Filed

### **AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

A leading reason for enlistment in the United States armed forces for service members is to enable them to pursue higher education after their military service. However, once service members are discharged from the military, they and their families face many barriers to accessing higher education. As a result, few Texas veterans complete a college degree after their service.

Currently, no state program exists to address this issue in a centralized location that can be accessed by veterans and their families.

This bill creates veterans resource centers (centers) to rectify the problem. The centers would provide centralized locations of assistance and information for veterans and their families during their educational careers. The centers would align with the Texas Veterans Commission's commitment to meeting the needs of this unique group of citizens across urban, rural, and border areas by delivering innovative and cost-effective programs to attract veterans and their family members to attend public colleges and universities in this state. This bill enables schools to create veteran-friendly environments; encourages veterans to take advantage of Montgomery GI Bill and Hazelwood Act opportunities; and provides assistance and certain services to veterans and their families throughout their educational experience, facilitating the transition of veterans from military service to the civilian workplace.

As proposed, S.B. 1621 amends current law relating to establishing veterans resource centers at certain institutions of higher education.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Veterans Commission in SECTION 1 (Section 434.157, Government Code) of this bill.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding Subchapter D, as follows:

#### **SUBCHAPTER D. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS**

Sec. 434.151. DEFINITIONS. Defines, in this subchapter, "commission," "education regions," and "institution of higher education."

Sec. 434.152. VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS. Requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to administer a veterans resource center in at least one institution of higher education in each region specified in Section 434.153 to:

- (1) provide a centralized place for veterans to find assistance and information while enrolled at an institution of higher education;
- (2) deliver innovative, cost-effective programs to attract veterans and family members of veterans to attend public institutions of higher education;

- (3) enable institutions of higher education to create veteran-friendly environments;
- (4) encourage veterans to take advantage of government educational programs; and
- (5) assist veterans in applying to public institutions of higher education.

Sec. 434.153. LOCATIONS OF CENTERS. Requires TVC to operate 15 veterans resource centers throughout the state with at least one veterans resource center located in each of certain enumerated higher education regions.

Sec. 434.154. DUTIES OF INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION. Requires each institution of higher education that has a veterans resource center to enter into a memorandum of understanding with TVC. Requires that the memorandum of understanding require the institution of higher education to provide and bear the cost of office space on the campus of the institution of higher education that is accessible to disabled persons and complies with any applicable federal and state law, and office equipment, telephone equipment and service, computer equipment, and Internet access.

Sec. 434.155. PROGRAM MANAGER. Requires TVC to employ a program manager to administer the veterans resource center program. Requires the program manager to:

- (1) provide leadership, training, support, and overall management of the veterans resource center program;
- (2) evaluate the effectiveness of veterans resource centers in identifying the services required by veterans to optimize the success of veterans and their families in obtaining a college education and in providing those services;
- (3) supervise the regional veterans resource counselors;
- (4) prepare an annual budget;
- (5) monitor the outcomes of the veterans resource center program;
- (6) using data provided by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, produce an annual report on veterans' attendance at public institutions of higher education;
- (7) apply to private organizations and foundations for grant funding or other support that complements the objectives of the program; and
- (8) perform any other task as required by TVC.

Sec. 434.156. REGIONAL VETERANS RESOURCE COUNSELORS. (a) Requires TVC to employ a regional veterans resource counselor for each education region to oversee the veterans resource center or centers located in the region.

(b) Requires a regional veterans resource counselor to maintain an office at a veterans resource center at an institution of higher education located in the region served by the veterans resource counselor.

(c) Requires each regional veterans resource counselor to:

- (1) visit the institutions of higher education located in the education region served by the veterans resource counselor;
- (2) work with those institutions of higher education to create a hospitable and supportive environment for veterans, enhance awareness of and

encourage participation in veterans educational programs and commission programs providing other services to veterans, including employment and claims assistance services, develop programs providing ancillary assistance to veterans based on the unique needs of veterans and their families, ensure that veterans successfully complete their education, and promote the establishment of a student veterans group on each campus in the region;

(3) work with local, state, and national veterans groups, including the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, to promote educational opportunities and benefits to the veteran population in the education region;

(4) work with local workforce development boards to ensure that veterans counselors are aware of available nontraditional educational opportunities, including on-the-job training programs and apprenticeships, and advise employers in the region of potential opportunities to create on-the-job training programs for veterans;

(5) work with education services officers at military installations to encourage active duty members of the armed forces of the United States and veterans to use federal and state educational benefits;

(6) create and manage publicity campaigns in concert with the commission and institutions of higher education in the education region to promote the use of education benefits under the federal Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (38 U.S.C. Section 3301 et seq.), the tuition exemption program for veterans and their dependents under Section 54.203, Education Code, and any other education benefit for veterans or their dependents under federal or state law;

(7) support programs to assist combat veteran students in readjusting and reintegrating into a noncombat environment;

(8) maintain statistical information regarding demographics of veterans assisted, application success, program completion rates, drop-out rates, and reasons for success or failure, as appropriate; and

(9) perform other activities, as assigned by TVC, to enhance the educational opportunities of veterans and their family members in the education region and throughout the state.

Sec. 434.157. RULEMAKING AUTHORITY. Authorizes TVC to adopt rules to implement this subchapter.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2011.