

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
85R18997 JRR-D

H.B. 865
By: Blanco; Minjarez (Rodríguez)
Criminal Justice
5/18/2017
Engrossed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Concerns have been raised about the frequency with which veterans returning home from deployment turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with emotional and physical harm from service, which in turn, leads many such veterans to enter the criminal justice system with prescription drug or substance abuse issues.

Private and public programs that address these concerns are often times overstretched and have extensive wait times. Additionally, the stigma associated with substance abuse and mental health issues deter veterans from seeking help.

H.B. 865 seeks to address these concerns by requiring the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to establish a veterans services coordinator to coordinate responses to the needs of veterans under TDCJ supervision and requiring TDCJ to establish and administer a voluntary rehabilitation and transition program for veterans confined in state jail felony facilities.

H.B. 865 amends current law relating to establishing a veterans services coordinator for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and a veterans reentry dorm program for certain state jail defendants confined by the department.

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 Subchapter A, Chapter 501, Government Code, by adding Section 501.025, as follows:

Sec. 501.025. VETERANS SERVICES COORDINATOR. (a) Requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to establish a veterans services coordinator (coordinator) to coordinate responses to the needs of veterans under the supervision of TDCJ, including veterans who are released on parole or mandatory supervision. Requires the coordinator, with the cooperation of the community justice assistance division, to provide information to community supervision and corrections departments to help those departments coordinate responses to the needs of veterans placed on community supervision. Requires the coordinator to coordinate veterans' services for all of TDCJ's divisions.

(b) Requires the coordinator, in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General, to provide each incarcerated veteran a child support modification application.

SECTION 2. Amends Subchapter B, Chapter 507, Government Code, by adding Section 507.034, as follows:

Sec. 507.034. VETERANS REENTRY DORM PROGRAM. (a) Requires TDCJ, in coordination with the Texas Veterans Commission, to establish and administer a

voluntary rehabilitation and transition program for defendants confined in state jail felony facilities who are veterans of the United States armed forces, including veterans of the reserves, national guard, or state guard and who suffer from a brain injury, a mental illness, a mental disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder, or substance abuse, or were victims of certain military sexual trauma, as defined by Section 124.002 (Authority to Establish Program; Eligibility).

(b) Requires that the program established under this section:

- (1) provide for investigating and verifying the veteran status of each defendant confined in a state jail felony facility 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;
- (2) be available to male defendants and, if resources are available, female defendants;
- (3) include provisions regarding interviewing and selecting defendants for participation in the program;
- (4) allow a defendant to decline participation in the program or to withdraw from the program at any time;
- (5) house defendants participating in the program in housing that is designed to mimic the squadron structure familiar to veterans;
- (6) coordinate and provide certain available services and programming approved by TDCJ; and
- (7) to the extent feasible, not later than the 60th day before the date a defendant participating in the program is scheduled for release or discharge from TDCJ, match the defendant with certain community-based veteran peer support services and transfer the defendant to certain state jail felony facilities.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2017.