

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center

S.B. 2104
By: Zaffirini
Veteran Affairs & Border Security
6/17/2019
Enrolled

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Veteran county service officers (VCSOs) assist veterans with accessing benefits and services. What's more, the creation and maintenance of a veterans county service office is an unfunded mandate for counties with a population of more than 200,000 persons. Given the larger number of veterans in these areas and the lack of clarity regarding the state's and the Texas Veterans Commission's (TVC) role in funding VCSOs, more information is needed to ensure VCSOs have all the resources they need to advocate effectively for veterans statewide.

Accordingly, S.B. 2104 would create the Texas Veterans County Service Officer Task Force to study the impact and efficacy of VCSOs. The Task Force would be comprised of the chair of the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security, the chair of the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs, a representative of the TVC, VCSOs from various regions of the state, and a representative of the Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations.

The task force would:

1. Examine the role and duties of VCSOs in each county;
2. Identify the regions that are in greatest need of VCSOs; and
3. Determine types and levels of support needed in order for VCSOs to appropriately advocate for the veterans they serve.

The Task Force would prepare and submit a report of the issues described above to the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security, House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs, and TVC by December 1, 2020. (Original Author's/Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

S.B. 2104 amends current law relating to certain advocacy and legal services for Texas Veterans and to tuition and fees for certain military spouses and dependents.

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 Section 434.017(c), Government Code, as follows:

(c) Creates Subdivision (3) from existing text and redesignates existing Subdivision (3) as Subdivision (4). Requires money in the fund for veterans' assistance appropriated to the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) under this subsection to be used to:

- (1) makes no changes to this subdivision;
- (2) make grants to provide pro bono legal services to veterans, active duty members of the United States armed forces, and members of the state military forces; and

(3)–(4) creates these subdivisions from existing text and makes no further changes.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 434.0171, Government Code, as follows:

Sec. 434.0171. STATE EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTIONS TO FUND FOR VETERANS' ASSISTANCE. Provides that, for purposes of Subchapter I (Charitable Contributions), Chapter 659:

(1) makes no changes to this subdivision; and

(2) a state employee is entitled to authorize a deduction for contributions to TVC for the purposes of managing the fund for veterans' assistance as a charitable contribution under Section 659.132 (Deduction Authorized), and TVC is authorized to use the contributions for the purposes listed in Section 434.017(c), for the purposes listed in Section 434.017(c), as redesignated and amended by Chapter 1418 (H.B. 3107), Acts of the 80th Legislature, Regular Session, 2007.

SECTION 3. Amends Subchapter B, Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding Section 434.040, as follows:

Sec. 434.040. TEXAS VETERANS COUNTY SERVICE OFFICER TASK FORCE. (a) Defines "rural county," "task force," and "urban county."

(b) Provides that the Texas Veterans County Service Officer Task Force (task force) is established to study the impact and efficacy of officers in this state.

(c) Provides that the task force is composed of the following nine members:

(1) the chair of the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs;

(2) the chair of the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security;

(3) a representative of the TVC;

(4) the chair of the Veterans County Service Officer Advisory Committee;

(5) a representative of the Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations;

(6) an officer representing a rural county selected by the chair of the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs;

(7) an officer representing an urban county selected by the chair of the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs;

(8) an officer representing a rural county selected by the chair of the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security; and

(9) an officer representing an urban county selected by the chair of the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security.

(d) Provides that the chairs of the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs and the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security serve as co-chairs of the task force.

(e) Requires a recommendation of the task force to be approved by a majority vote of the members of the task force.

(f) Provides that each member of the task force has one vote.

(g) Requires the task force to:

(1) examine the role and duties of officers in each county;

(2) identify the regions of this state that are in need of officers; and

(3) determine types and levels of support needed from this state in order for officers to appropriately advocate for the veterans served by the officers.

(h) Requires TVC, not later than December 1, 2020, to prepare and submit a report based on recommendations of the task force regarding the issues described in Subsection (g) to the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security and House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs. Requires the report to be approved by a majority vote of the members of the task force.

(i) Provides that this section expires January 1, 2021.

SECTION 4. Amends Section 434.154(a), Government Code, as follows:

(a) Redesignates existing Subdivision (9) as Subdivision (10). Authorizes the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services to, by majority vote, establish the following coordinating workgroups to focus on specific issues affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families:

(1)–(8) makes no further changes to these subdivisions;

(9) pro bono legal services for veterans, including opportunities and obstacles for providing those services; and

(10) makes no further changes to this subdivision.

SECTION 5. Amends Section 54.241(g), Education Code, as follows:

(g) Creates Subdivision (1) from existing text. Requires an institution of higher education, if a member of the Armed Forces of the United States is stationed outside Texas, rather than requiring the institution of higher education, if a member of the Armed Forces of the United States is stationed outside Texas, and the member's spouse or child establishes residence in Texas by residing in Texas and by filing with the Texas institution of higher education at which the spouse or child plans to register a letter of intent to establish residence in Texas, to:

(1) permit the member's spouse or child to pay the tuition, fees, and other charges provided for Texas residents without regard to the length of time that the spouse or child has resided in Texas if the spouse or child establishes residence in Texas by residing in Texas and by filing with the Texas institution of higher education at which the spouse or child plans to register a letter of intent to establish residence in Texas; and

(2) permit the member's spouse to pay the tuition, fees, and other charges provided for Texas residents if the spouse:

(A) graduated from a public or private high school in this state or received the equivalent of a high school diploma in this state; and

(B) maintained a domicile in this state continuously for at least one year before the member was assigned to duty outside Texas.

SECTION 6. Provides that Section 54.241, Education Code, as amended by this Act, applies beginning with tuition and fees charged for the 2019 fall semester.

SECTION 7. (a) Effective date, except as provided by Subsection (b) of this section: September 1, 2019.

(b) Effective date, Section 54.241, Education Code, as amended by this Act: upon passage or September 1, 2019.