

- SUBJECT:** Creating assistance, service programs for veterans and military families
- COMMITTEE:** Defense and Veterans' Affairs — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 5 ayes — S. King, Frank, Aycock, Blanco, Farias
- 2 nays — Schaefer, Shaheen
- WITNESSES:** For — Monique Rodriguez, Grace After Fire; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Katharine Ligon, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Eric Woomer, Federation of Texas Psychiatry; Bill Kelly, Mental Health America of Greater Houston; Laura Austin and Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Josette Saxton, Texans Care for Children; Jim Brennan and Morgan Little, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; James Cunningham, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations, Texas Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America; LaShondra Jones, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; Stacy Wilson, Texas Hospital Association; Randall Chapman, Texas Legal Services Center; Michelle Romero, Texas Medical Association; William West, the American Legion of Texas; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Olie Pope, Veterans County Service Officers Association of Texas; Sheena Harsh; Todd Jermstad; Sara Olmstead; Michael Wolfe)
- Against — Lee Spiller, Citizens Commission on Human Rights; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Dana Ambs; Dean Blanchard)
- On — Sasha Rasco, Department of Family and Protective Services; Robert Dole, Texas Department of State Health Services; Sean Hanna, Texas Veterans Commission
- BACKGROUND:** Various programs provide health services to veterans, including the Military Veteran Peer Network. SB 1325 by Nelson, enacted by the 81st Legislature in 2009, created a mental health intervention program for peer-to-peer counseling. Some observers note that few services use local communities to address prevention of family violence, abuse, and neglect

of both veterans and their families.

DIGEST:

Veterans and Military Families Preventive Services Program. CSHB 19 would require the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to develop and implement a veterans and military families preventive services program. The program would serve veterans and military families who had committed, had experienced, or were at a high risk of family violence or abuse or neglect.

The program would be required to:

- coordinate with community-based organizations;
- include both prevention and early intervention components;
- collaborate with services for child welfare, services for early childhood education, and other child and family services programs; and
- coordinate with the community collaboration initiative established by this bill and the committees formed by local communities under the initiative.

The bill would allow the program to be established initially as a pilot program at the discretion of the DFPS in areas of the state where the department considered the implementation practicable. The department would evaluate the program and prepare an annual report on the outcomes of the program, which DFPS would publish on its website.

The bill also would add two veteran assistance agencies, including a statewide coordination of mental health program and a community collaboration initiative.

Statewide coordination of mental health program for veterans. The bill would require the Texas Veterans Commission and the Department of State Health Services to coordinate to administer the mental health program for veterans, under Health and Safety Code, ch. 1001. For the mental health program for veterans, the commission would:

- provide certification training and continuing education to volunteer coordinators and peers;
- provide technical assistance to volunteer coordinators and peers;
- recruit, train, and communicate with community-based therapists, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations;
- coordinate services for justice involved veterans; and
- provide appropriate facilities to the extent funding was available.

The executive director of the commission would have to appoint a program director to administer the mental health program for veterans.

The commission also would be required to develop and implement methods for providing certification training to volunteer coordinators. This training would include initial certification and recertification training, and continuing education. The commission also would be required to manage and coordinate the peer training program to include initial training, advanced training, certification, and continuing education for peers associated with the mental health program.

Community collaboration initiative. As part of the mental health program for veterans, the bill would require the Texas Veterans Commission and the Department of State Health Services to include an initiative to encourage local communities to collaborate in synchronizing locally accessible resources that were available for veterans and military service members.

The initiative would be designed to encourage local communities to form a committee that would develop a plan to identify and support the needs of veterans and military service members residing in their community. The commission could designate general areas of focus for the initiative.

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.

NOTES: According to the Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note, the pilot program

created by the bill would cost \$3.6 million in general revenue in fiscal 2016-17.