

SUBJECT: Grants to support mental health programs for veterans and their families

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

VOTE: 6 ayes — S. King, Frank, Aycock, Blanco, Farias, Schaefer

1 nay — Shaheen

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 9 — 31-0

WITNESSES: (*On House companion bill, HB 1429*)

For — Bill Kelly, Mental Health America of Greater Houston; Kate Murphy, Texas Public Policy Foundation; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jim Allison, County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas; Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; John Dahill, Texas Conference of Urban Counties; Cate Graziani, Mental Health America of Texas; Conrad John, Travis County Commissioners Court; Lee Johnson, Texas Council of Community Centers; Lashondra Jones, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; Katharine Ligon, Center for Public Policy Priorities; Mark Mendez, Tarrant County Commissioners Court; Seth Mitchell, Bexar County Commissioners Court; Charles Reed, Dallas County; Josette Saxton, Texans Care for Children; Casey Smith, United Ways of Texas; Stacy Wilson, Texas Hospital Association; Eric Woomer, Federation of Texas Psychiatry)

Against — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Chris Jaramillo)

On — Trina Ita, Department of State Health Services; Andy Keller, Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Sonja Gaines, Health and Human Service Commission)

DIGEST: SB 55 would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to create a grant program, subject to available appropriations for that purpose, to support community mental health programs and services for veterans with mental illness. HHSC would contract with a private entity to support and administer the grant program so that:

- HHSC and the private entity each provided half of the money to be awarded in grants;
- the private entity developed eligibility criteria for grant applicants, acceptable uses of grant money by grant recipients, and reporting requirements for grant recipients; and
- the private entity obtained HHSC's approval of the eligibility criteria, acceptable uses, and reporting requirements before awarding any grants.

The executive commissioner of HHSC would have to adopt any rules necessary to implement the grant program.

This bill would take effect September 1, 2015.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

SB 55 would help create robust mental health services for veterans and their families. The bill would create a holistic approach for helping veterans and could help provide mental health services that currently are not offered or that need to be expanded.

The bill would lead to public-private partnerships and maximize public dollars by requiring a 100 percent funding match from each private entity. This could result in further cost savings for the state because it would focus on reducing acuity and preventing future hospitalizations and the use of expensive crisis services.

SB 55 would enhance existing mental health programs for veterans by supporting community-based efforts. While there are other grant programs for veterans, the program under the bill would help pull communities together through public-private partnerships to organize mental health services. This is important because mental health care is an issue that local communities can address better than the state. Currently, services for veterans are fragmented and do not address all the needs of veterans and their families. The bill would seek to take a comprehensive, community-based approach to addressing the needs of Texas veterans and welcoming them home.

OPPONENTS
SAY: SB 55 could result in a costly duplication of services. Instead of using millions of dollars to create more grant programs, Texas should focus on strengthening and promoting existing programs.

NOTES: The House companion bill, HB 1429 by S. King, was considered in a public hearing of the Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs on March 18 and left pending.

The Legislative Budget Board estimates SB 55 would have a negative net impact of \$20 million to general revenue through fiscal 2016-17. Both the House and Senate versions of the proposed fiscal 2016-17 general appropriations act contain \$20 million in Art. 2 to fund the mental health for veterans grant program.