

- SUBJECT:** Establishing a PTSD research center and veteran suicide prevention plan
- COMMITTEE:** Defense and Veterans' Affairs — committee substitute recommended
- VOTE:** 7 ayes — Gutierrez, Blanco, Arévalo, Cain, Flynn, Lambert, Wilson
0 nays
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, March 28 — 31-0
- WITNESSES:** No public hearing
- BACKGROUND:** Observers have noted the need to improve mental health and prevent suicide among Texas veterans. They contend that creation of a clinical and research center for combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) would allow The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio to expand its clinical trials and treatment studies and provide training for health care providers who interact with active military members and veterans suffering from PTSD.
- DIGEST:** CSSB 578 would require the board of regents of the University of Texas System to establish the National Center for Warrior Resiliency at The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio (UTHSCSA). The center would research issues regarding the detection, prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder and comorbid conditions. The center also would provide clinical care to enhance the psychological resiliency of military personnel and veterans.
- The board of regents would provide for the employment of the center's staff, provide the center's operating budget, and choose a site for the center at UTHSCSA. An employee of the center would be a UT System employee.
- The bill would allow the board to solicit, accept, and administer gifts and grants from any public or private source for the center's use and benefit.

The center could collaborate with public and private entities, including institutions of higher education, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Defense, the National Institutes of Health, and the Texas Veterans Commission, to perform the center's research functions.

The bill also would require the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to collaborate with public and private entities to develop an action plan to prevent veteran suicides by increasing access to and availability of professional veteran health services. An action plan would have to:

- provide proactive outreach methods to reach veterans needing care;
- identify funding resources to provide accessible, affordable veteran mental health services;
- provide measures to expand public-private partnerships to ensure access to quality, timely mental health services;
- address suicide prevention awareness, measures, and training on veterans involved in the justice system; and
- provide for peer-to-peer service coordination, including training, certification, recertification, and continuing education for peer coordinators.

The bill would require HHSC to make specific short-term and long-term statutory, administrative, and budget-related recommendations to the Legislature and the governor on policy initiatives and reforms necessary to implement the action plan. The initiatives and reforms in the short-term plan and long-term plan would have to be fully implemented by September 1, 2021, and September 1, 2027, respectively. The provisions relate to the action plan would expire on September 1, 2027.

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, 2017.

NOTES: CSSB 578 differs from the Senate-passed version in that the committee

substitute would require the board of regents of the University of Texas System to establish the National Center for Warrior Resiliency at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

A companion bill, HB 3032 by Blanco, was referred to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs on March 27.