

SUBJECT: Providing grants for pro bono legal services for veterans, service members

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 6 ayes — Flynn, Tinderholt, Ashby, Hinojosa, Ramos, Romero

0 nays

3 absent — Lopez, Lozano, Reynolds

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 17 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: *On House companion bill, HB 3359:*

For — Charlie Malouff, Texas Inmate Families Association; Steven Price, The Voices of Our Veterans and the Texas Democratic Veterans; (*Registered, but did not testify:* Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; John Mckinny, American Legion; Matthew Schaefer, Gathering of Eagles; Bob Gebhard; Idona Griffith; Valerie James)

Against — None

BACKGROUND: Government Code sec. 434.017 establishes the Fund for Veterans' Assistance in the state treasury outside the general revenue fund. Money in the fund may be appropriated only to the Texas Veterans Commission for grants to address veterans' needs and other specified purposes.

Sec. 434.154 allows the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services to establish, by majority vote, coordinating workgroups to focus on specific issues affecting veterans, service members, and their families.

Concerns have been raised that many veterans struggle to afford legal assistance for various legal issues, which further complicates the challenges they face in readjusting to civilian life.

DIGEST: CSSB 2047 would expand the allowable uses of money appropriated to the Texas Veterans Commission from the Fund for Veterans' Assistance to

include making grants to provide pro bono legal services to veterans, active duty members of the U.S. armed forces, and members of state military forces.

The Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services could establish a coordinating workgroup to focus on pro bono legal services for veterans, including opportunities and obstacles for providing those services.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2019.