

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 898
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
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AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Peer-to-peer mental health services for veterans are based on a model of formal and informal discussions that allow combat veterans to talk to other combat veterans. This shared experience is rarely found among those who are not military veterans. Additional statutory structure is necessary as the Mental Health Program for Veterans adds more interested peer volunteers and expands its network across the state.

S.B. 898 establishes a new subchapter within the Health and Safety Code for the provision of the Mental Health Program for Veterans. S.B. 898 creates definitions for "peer" to include family members and allows veterans of any discharge status, other than dishonorable, to be eligible for these services. Further, the bill incorporates required elements of the program such as access to licensed mental health professionals and grants to regional and local organizations providing these services.

Grants awarded under this program must ensure that the maximum amount is spent on direct services to veterans and work to expand the capacity of the peer-to-peer network, among other provisions. S.B. 898 also requires an annual report for the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) detailing program activities and making recommendations for program improvement.

S.B. 898 enhances the statutory parameters for DSHS to administer the Mental Health Program for Veterans by establishing or defining program eligibility, program elements, grant expectations, and reporting.

As proposed, S.B. 898 amends current law relating to the mental health program for veterans.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Department of State Health Services in SECTION 2 (Section 1001.202, Health and Safety Code) of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 1001.071, Health and Safety Code, to provide that the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is responsible for administering certain human services programs regarding the public health, including implementing a mental health program for veterans.

SECTION 2. Amends Chapter 1001, Health and Safety Code, by adding Subchapter H, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER H. MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM FOR VETERANS

Sec. 1001.201. DEFINITIONS. Defines "peer," "veteran," and "volunteer coordinator" in this section.

Sec. 1001.202. GENERAL POWERS AND DUTIES. (a) Requires DSHS to develop a mental health intervention program for veterans. Requires that the program include peer-to-peer counseling; access to licensed mental health professionals for volunteer

coordinators and peers; training approved by DSHS for peers; technical assistance for volunteer coordinators and peers; grants to regional and local organizations providing services under this subchapter; recruitment, retention, and screening of community-based therapists; suicide prevention training for volunteer coordinators and peers; and veteran jail diversion services, including veterans courts.

(b) Requires DSHS to solicit and ensure that specialized training is provided to persons who are peers and who want to provide peer-to-peer counseling or other peer-to-peer services under the program.

(c) Authorizes DSHS to adopt rules necessary to implement this subchapter.

Sec. 1001.203. GRANTS. (a) Requires DSHS to establish a grant program through which DSHS is authorized to award grants to regional and local organizations for the delivery of programs or services described by this subchapter.

(b) Requires that a grant awarded under this section emphasize direct services to veterans provided by peers, leverage additional local resources to provide funding for programs or services for veterans, and increase the capacity of the mental health program for veterans.

(c) Prohibits a grant awarded under this section from being used to supplant existing expenditures associated with programs or services within DSHS.

Sec. 1001.204. ANNUAL REPORT. Requires DSHS, not later than December 1 of each year, to submit a report to the governor and the legislature that includes the number of veterans who received services through the mental health program for veterans, the number of peers and volunteer coordinators trained, a summary of the grants awarded and services provided through those grants, an evaluation of the services provided under this subchapter, and recommendations for program improvements.

SECTION 3. Repealer: Section 1001.076 (Mental Health Program for Veterans), Health and Safety Code.

SECTION 4. Requires DSHS, not later than January 1, 2014, to modify the mental health intervention program for veterans as required by Subchapter H, Chapter 1001, Health and Safety Code, as added by this Act.

SECTION 5. Effective date: September 1, 2013.