

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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C.S.S.B. 544
By: Lucio
Veteran Affairs & Border Security
4/13/2017
Committee Report (Substituted)

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Currently, Chapter 434, Government Code, requires every county with a population of 200,000 or more to maintain a veterans county service office and to appoint a veterans county service officer (VCSO). VCSOs are statutorily required to "aid any county resident who served in the armed forces or nurses corps of the United States, and any orphan or dependent of the person, to prepare, submit, and present any claim against the United States or a state for benefits to which the person may be entitled under United States or state law." In the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations (VAMI) Interim Report to the 85th Legislature, VAMI reported that VCSOs "provide invaluable support in all areas of life in addition to their role in claims assistance to veterans and their families."

State statute requires that the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) provide training to VCSOs. In addition to this TVC training, VCSOs also receive training and certification from other accredited agencies. During the interim, VAMI heard testimony from the VCSO Association of Texas on their training requirements; the association requested a change to the current statutory language to allow VCSOs who receive training through outside organizations to count towards the mandatory state training. S.B. 544 addresses this concern by updating state statute. (Original Author's / Sponsor's Statement of Intent)

C.S.S.B. 544 amends current law relating to required training for veterans county service officers and assistant veterans county service officers.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Sections 434.038(a), (b), (c), and (e), Government Code, as follows:

(a) Requires a veterans county service officer (VCSO), within the time after the date of the VCSO's appointment that the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) prescribes, to complete a course of initial training provided by TVC or approved under Subsection (e)(5) (relating to approved training provided by public or private entities to fulfill initial and continuing training requirements). Requires TVC to issue the VCSO a certificate of training after completion of all the initial training requirements established by TVC under this section, rather than after completion of the initial training course. Requires the VCSO, to maintain certification, to complete continuing training required by TVC that is approved under Subsection (e)(5) or provided by TVC, rather than to the extent required by TVC.

(b) Authorizes, rather than requires, TVC to provide, at TVC expense, the initial and continuing training required by this section at least once a year. Requires TVC, if state funds are appropriated for that purpose, to reimburse a VCSO's travel and lodging expenses incurred in attending training provided by TVC. Requires TVC to make the reimbursement in the manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state employees.

(c) Requires the commissioners court of a VCSO's county to reimburse a VCSO's travel and lodging expenses incurred in attending training required under this section (Training and Certification) that is approved under Subsection (e)(5), rather than expenses incurred in attending TVC training, unless state funds are appropriated for that purpose. Deletes existing text requiring TVC, if state funds are appropriated, to make the reimbursement in the manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state employees.

(e) Requires TVC, among certain other tasks, to approve the training provided by public or private entities to fulfill initial and continuing training requirements established by TVC. Makes nonsubstantive changes.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2017.