

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 591
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Veteran Affairs & Border Security
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 591 arises from the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations (VAMI) Interim Report to the 85th Legislature. As VAMI reported, "Texas is home to 1.67 million veterans, second only to California. The veteran population itself is evolving with increasing numbers of women veterans, an aging Vietnam era population, and a growing population of younger veterans exiting service from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan."

Interested parties believe that with such a large veteran population, veteran services and programs in the state need to be increased and expanded to better service the unique challenges that veterans face in Texas. The VAMI Committee expressed a similar concern with the challenges of veterans when it reported that "Texas veterans are facing a myriad of health issues that have yet to be adequately addressed, including mental health concerns such as PTSD, TBI, MDD, and anxiety, as well as eternally physical conditions." Concerned stakeholders believe that it would benefit the state to increase awareness of the wide range of services that are offered in Texas so as to better enable veterans to access and participate in the services.

Echoing one of the critical findings of the VAMI report—that "Texas has a unique opportunity to find and implement solutions to assist our service men and women"—S.B. 591 builds on the findings of the VAMI Committee report to better inform veterans in Texas of the services, programs and benefits that they may be entitled to.

Specifically, S.B. 591 codifies into the Texas Veterans Commission's (TVC's) enabling statute a community outreach campaign to provide information to, and increase awareness of, benefits and services available to veterans, including: claims assistance services; technology services; health, financial, rehabilitation, and housing services; employment and reemployment services; and legal services, including the veterans treatment court program.

Additionally, S.B. 591 maximizes TVC's ability to better inform and reach veterans by providing that the community outreach campaign must include outreach efforts at places where veterans routinely gather, including community centers and places of worship.

The bill strengthens TVC's outreach effort by providing the authority to collaborate with, and contract with, community-based or nonprofit organizations to implement the community outreach campaign, as well as to solicit and accept gifts and grants to fund the community outreach campaign

As proposed, S.B. 591 amends current law relating to a community outreach campaign to increase awareness of veterans benefits and services.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to Texas Veterans Commission in SECTION 2 of this bill.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter A, Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding Section 434.024, as follows:

Sec.434.024. VETERANS COMMUNITY OUTREACH CAMPAIGN. (a) Requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to conduct a community outreach campaign to provide information relating to and increase awareness of certain benefits and services available to veterans.

(b) Requires the community outreach campaign to include outreach efforts at certain locations.

(c) Requires TVC to collaborate with, and authorizes TVC to contract with, community-based or nonprofit organizations to implement the community outreach campaign under this section.

(d) Authorizes TVC to solicit and accept gifts and grants to fund the community outreach campaign under this section.

SECTION 2. Requires TVC, not later than November 1, 2018, to establish the veterans community outreach campaign as required under Section 434.024, Government Code, as added by this Act, and adopt any rules necessary to implement the campaign.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2017.