

- SUBJECT:** Allocating certain grants from the fund for veterans’ assistance
- COMMITTEE:** Defense and Veterans’ Affairs — favorable, without amendment
- VOTE:** 8 ayes — Menéndez, R. Sheffield, Collier, Farias, Frank, R. Miller, Moody, Zedler
1 nay — Schaefer
- SENATE VOTE:** On final passage, April 4 — 30-0
- WITNESSES:** (On House companion bill, HB 781:)
For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: James Cunningham, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations and Military Officers Association of America; Carlos Higgins, Austin Military Officers Association; Phillip Lindner, National Guard Association of Texas; Morgan Little, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations; Joe Lovelace, Texas Council of Community Centers; John Miterko, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations)
Against — None
On — Robert Norris, Legislative Budget Board; Thomas Palladino, Texas Veterans Commission; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Kathy Wood, Texas Veterans Commission)
- BACKGROUND:** The Fund for Veterans Assistance is a grants program founded in 2009 and administered by the Texas Veterans Commission that reimburses entities that offer direct services to veterans and their families. Such services include financial assistance, counseling, housing, legal aid, and employment assistance. The fund has awarded \$23.8 million in state funds through grants to 74 nonprofits and local governments.

The Legislative Budget Board in its “Government Effectiveness and Efficiency Report” submitted to the 83rd Legislature recommended a statutory change that would require the Texas Veterans Commission to perform a needs assessment that would direct the allocation of grants from the Fund for Veterans Assistance. The needs assessment would be

conducted every two years and incorporated into the fund's grant award decision-making process.

DIGEST: SB 664 would require the Texas Veterans Commission to conduct an assessment every two years by May 1 beginning in 2014 that would identify the specific high-priority needs of veterans and the services available through the Fund for Veterans Assistance to address those needs. The commission would determine the grant categories that matched the high-priority needs and identify the gaps between veterans' needs and services.

The results and determinations of the assessment would inform the priorities and process of awarding grants.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2013.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 664 would illuminate any gaps between the services provided to the state's veterans and the unmet needs that could be addressed by the Fund for Veterans Assistance.

The fund awards reimbursement grants to nonprofits and local governments that aid veterans with financial assistance, housing, legal assistance, and other services. The current process for awarding grants is thoroughly vetted, and the services that receive funding are well researched by an effective network of commission employees and veterans' advocates.

The bill would help the fund gather more information so that it more efficiently could direct resources to veteran's high-priority needs. This information also would help determine the priority for addressing the most critical challenges facing veterans. Similar assessments in Virginia and New York helped veterans' organizations in those states improve the effectiveness of their funds. SB 664 would do the same for Texas and ensure that veterans got the most out of grant funding.

OPPONENTS SAY: SB 664 is unnecessary because the Fund for Veterans Assistance, which is administered by the Texas Veterans Commission, already has an effective network of employees and advocates from which it can draw the best advice about how to award grants.