

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
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S.B. 34
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Veteran Affairs & Military Installations
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As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

S.B. 34 will establish the Texas Women Veterans Program within the Texas Veterans Commission. The mission of this program is to ensure that the women veterans of Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services.

The Texas Veterans Commission currently assists women in accessing Veteran Affairs (VA) benefit programs and healthcare services. There are slightly more than 150,000 women veterans in Texas, but many of them are not able to take advantage of the benefits and services afforded to them due to a lack of awareness or because the services are tailored to be specific and as such are inadvertently exclusionary to women. Examples of exclusionary services include group counseling sessions for persons who suffer from post traumatic stress.

The current level of assistance is provided only as a service within the Texas Veterans Commission. There is no statute in place that provides for or protects women veterans exclusively.

This bill will create a program within the Texas Veterans Commission whose sole purpose is to ensure that women veterans have fair and equitable access to state and federal veterans' benefits and services. This new program will be known as the Texas Women Veterans program and it will fulfill its purpose by performing outreach functions to improve awareness of available benefits and services, honor and recognize women veterans, review programs, research projects, incorporate issues concerning women veterans in commission planning, and even make recommendations to the executive director regarding the improvement of benefits and services.

The program will work with other agencies and will disseminate information about opportunities for women veterans to these agencies. Women veterans applying for grants, benefits, or services will be educated on the process to better guide them through it. Moreover, this program will recommend legislative initiatives and the development of policies on the local, state, and national levels to address the issues affecting women veterans.

The primary focus of this program rests on the advocacy, public awareness, collaboration with other agencies, research, honor and recognition, and general assistance. This program is applicable to women who have served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States or in the Texas National Guard on federal active duty under Title 10, United States Code, and were discharged or released from that service under conditions other than dishonorable.

As proposed, S.B. 34 amends current law relating to the establishment and operation of the Texas Women Veterans Program.

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 Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding Subchapter D, as follows:

SUBCHAPTER D. TEXAS WOMEN VETERANS PROGRAM

Sec. 434.151. DEFINITIONS. Defines "commission," "executive director," "program," and "woman veteran."

Sec. 434.152. ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM; PROGRAM MISSION. (a) Provides that the Texas Women Veterans Program (program) is established in the Texas Veterans Commission (commission). Provides that the program is attached to the office of the executive director of the commission (executive director) for administrative purposes.

(b) Provides that the mission of the program is to ensure that the women veterans of this state have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services.

Sec. 434.153. COORDINATOR. Requires the executive director to designate a women veterans coordinator for this state.

Sec. 434.154. GENERAL PROGRAM DUTIES. Requires that the program:

(1) provide assistance to the women veterans of this state as provided by this subchapter;

(2) perform outreach functions to improve the awareness of women veterans of their eligibility for federal and state veterans' benefits and services;

(3) assess the needs of women veterans with respect to benefits and services;

(4) review programs, research projects, and other initiatives designed to address the needs of the women veterans of this state;

(5) make recommendations to the executive director regarding the improvement of benefits and services to women veterans; and

(6) incorporate issues concerning women veterans in commission planning regarding veterans' benefits and services.

Sec. 434.155. ADVOCACY AND PUBLIC AWARENESS. (a) Requires that the program advocate for women veterans and work to increase public awareness about the gender-specific needs of women veterans.

(b) Requires that the program recommend legislative initiatives and the development of policies on the local, state, and national levels to address the issues affecting women veterans.

Sec. 434.156. COLLABORATION. Requires that the program collaborate with federal, state, and private agencies that provide services to women veterans.

Sec. 434.157. RESEARCH; DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION. (a) Requires that the program monitor and research issues relating to women veterans.

(b) Requires that the program disseminate information regarding opportunities for women veterans throughout the network of entities with which the program collaborates.

Sec. 434.158. EDUCATION. Requires that the program through conferences, seminars, and training workshops with federal, state, and private agencies provide guidance and direction to a woman veteran who is applying for grants, benefits, or services.

Sec. 434.159. HONOR AND RECOGNITION. Requires that the program promote events and activities that recognize and honor the women veterans of this state and women who serve in the military.

Sec. 434.160. FACILITIES. Requires that the program provide facilities as appropriate in support of the program to the extent funding is available for that purpose.

Sec. 434.161. FUNDING. Authorizes the executive director, on behalf of the program, to accept and spend funds appropriated to the commission for the operation of the program and funds received from other sources, including donations and grants.

SECTION 2. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2011.