

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
84R9441 AAF-F

H.B. 1762  
By: Otto et al. (Lucio)  
Veteran Affairs & Military Installations  
5/7/2015  
Engrossed

### **AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT**

Currently, over one million veterans reside throughout Texas and roughly 485,000 are enrolled in the VA healthcare system. Recently, the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) has been called upon to help Texas veterans and their families as crises have arisen at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Whether working to address an influx of claims related to Agent Orange exposure in 2009, reducing the VA backlog in 2013, or working to address a growing number of VA appeals, Texas veterans have utilized TVC as an advocate for them at the VA. In 2014, allegations emerged that VA staff had reduced wait times by manipulating reported data, and that veterans had died while awaiting appointments for medical care.

H.B. 1762 would create a health care advocacy program within TVC to resolve access issues raised by Texas veterans at VA healthcare facilities. The healthcare advocacy program for veterans will strategically place healthcare liaisons in VA facilities throughout the state, coordinating with VA medical administrators to resolve access issues raised by veterans.

H.B. 1762 seeks to codify the current efforts of the Texas Healthcare Strike Force within TVC to resolve any access issues faced by Texas Veterans at VA healthcare facilities.

H.B. 1762 amends current law relating to the creation of a health care advocacy program for veterans.

### **RULEMAKING AUTHORITY**

Rulemaking authority is expressly granted to the Texas Veterans Commission in SECTION 1 (Section 434.023, Government Code) of this bill.

### **SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS**

SECTION 1. Amends Subchapter A, Chapter 434, Government Code, by adding Section 434.023, as follows:

Sec. 434.023. HEALTH CARE ADVOCACY PROGRAM FOR VETERANS. (a)  
Defines "veteran."

(b) Requires the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) by rule to establish and implement a health care advocacy program to assist veterans in gaining access to health care facilities of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

(c) Requires the program to provide assistance to veterans by resolving any access issues raised by veterans in this state or referred to TVC by:

(1) the veterans toll-free hotline operated under Section 161.077 (Communications Center), Natural Resources Code;

(2) coordinating with the Veterans Health Administration of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to support the health care advocacy program established under this section;

- (3) coordinating with health care providers in this state to expand providers' opportunities to treat veterans through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs;
- (4) reviewing and researching programs, projects, and initiatives designed to address the health care needs of veterans;
- (5) evaluating the effectiveness of the efforts of TVC to improve access to health care services for veterans;
- (6) making recommendations to the executive director of TVC to improve health care services and assistance for veterans;
- (7) incorporating veterans' health care issues into TVC's strategic plan required under Section 2056.002 (Strategic Plans);
- (8) assisting veterans in securing benefits and services; and
- (9) recommending legislative initiatives and policies at the local, state, and national levels to address issues affecting health care for veterans.

(d) Requires the executive director of TVC to appoint a program coordinator to administer the health care advocacy program.

(e) Requires TVC to provide facilities as appropriate to support the program to the extent funding is available for that purpose.

SECTION 2. Requires TVC, as soon as practicable after the effective date of this Act but not later than January 1, 2016, to establish the health care advocacy program for veterans as required under Section 434.023, Government Code, as added by this Act, and requires TVC to adopt any rules necessary to implement the program.

SECTION 3. Effective date: upon passage or September 1, 2015.