

## **BILL ANALYSIS**

Senate Research Center  
84R3001 JRR-F

H.B. 875  
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Criminal Justice  
5/8/2015  
Engrossed

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

Recently enacted legislation requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to verify an inmate's veteran status by using the Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS), which also is used to assist veterans in applying for federal benefits for which they may qualify.

However, interested parties contend that these results are returned to TDCJ from the Health and Human Services Commission on a quarterly basis under established federal guidelines and fail to capture the most up-to-date information on veterans located in county jails.

In light of these shortcomings, the parties point out a new federal system that would provide real time information and status verification to TDCJ, allowing for the timely identification of incarcerated veterans and for increased access by such veterans to federal benefits.

These parties contend that TDCJ and Texas veterans would be better served using the new system in place of PARIS. H.B. 875 seeks to address this issue by revising provisions relating to the verification of the veteran status of inmates and prisoners.

H.B. 875 amends current law relating to the verification of the veteran status of inmates and prisoners.

### **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 Section 501.023, Government Code, as added by Chapter 261 (H.B. 634), Acts of the 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013, as follows:

Sec. 501.023. VERIFICATION OF INMATE VETERAN STATUS. (a) Requires the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), during the diagnostic process, to record information relating to an inmate's military history in the inmate's admission sheet and intake screening form, or any other similar document.

Deletes existing text defining "system."

(b) Requires TDCJ to:

(1) in consultation with the Texas Veterans Commission, investigate and verify the veteran status of each inmate by using the best available federal data, rather than data made available from the system through the Health and Human Services Commission; and

(2) use the data described by Subdivision (1) to assist inmates who are veterans in applying for federal benefits or compensation for which the

inmates may be eligible under a program administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

SECTION 2. Amends Section 511.009(a), Government Code, as follows:

(a) Requires the Commission on Jail Standards to:

(1)-(19) Makes a nonsubstantive change; and

(20) require the sheriff of each county to:

(A) investigate and verify the veteran status of each prisoner by using data made available from the Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) operated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or a similar service; and

(B) use the data described by Paragraph (A) to assist prisoners who are veterans in applying for federal benefits or compensation for which the prisoners may be eligible under a program administered by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

SECTION 3. Effective date: September 1, 2015.