

SUBJECT: Requiring DPS to provide information on state services to veterans

COMMITTEE: Defense and Veterans' Affairs — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — S. King, Frank, Aycock, Blanco, Farias

1 nay — Shaheen

1 absent — Schaefer

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, April 23 — 30-0

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Gyl Switzer, Mental Health America of Texas; Laura Austin and Greg Hansch, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Texas; Jim Brennan, Texas Coalition of Veterans Organizations)

Against — None

On — Rachel Shumaker, Texas Veterans Commission; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Sheri Gipson, Texas Department of Public Safety)

DIGEST: SB 1308 would require the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the Texas Veterans Commission to jointly develop a one-page informational paper about veterans services provided by the state for individuals receiving a driver's license or personal identification certificate with a veteran's designation.

DPS would be required to provide the recipient of the driver's license or personal identification certificate the one-page informational paper at the time the license or certificate was issued.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2015.

SUPPORTERS SAY: SB 1308 would help veterans access services they need to transition into civilian life by informing them of services available in Texas. Many

veterans are unaware of services provided by the state that could assist them. This bill would ensure that Texas was more proactive in connecting veterans with benefits they had earned any time they received a driver's license or ID card.

The comprehensive pamphlet of information required by the bill would provide critical information to veterans in one place. The pamphlet would include websites, hotlines, and various contact information for linking veterans with mental health services, Veterans Health Administration claims and advocacy services, education resources, and employment benefits. The unemployment rate for veterans is higher than the state average, and this pamphlet could help many seeking jobs.

The bill would provide an important service at a low cost. The Texas Veterans Commission already has all the necessary information, and the only minor cost would be the reproduction of materials. This cost could easily be absorbed into existing budgets, as projected by the Legislative Budget Board's fiscal note.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

SB 1308 would amount to an unfunded mandate. The Department of Public Safety (DPS) would have to produce and print a pamphlet of veterans services information for distribution at offices throughout the state with no additional funding. The department would absorb the costs of producing the information for tens of thousands of veterans every year.

The bill also is unnecessary because veterans already have many ways to obtain information about available state services. Requiring DPS to provide that same information would be unnecessary and duplicative.