



Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

Public Act No. 16-192

AN ACT CONCERNING WOMEN VETERANS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Subsections (b) and (c) of section 27-102~~l~~ of the 2016 supplement to the general statutes are repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

(b) (1) The commissioner may appoint a unit head to administer a veterans' advocacy and assistance unit for the aid and benefit of veterans, their spouses and eligible dependents and family members. Such unit shall conduct an annual training course for any city or town employee designated a veterans' service contact person pursuant to subsection (b) of section 27-135, as amended by this act. The unit shall have a staff of not less than eight men and women, including six veterans' service officers, and clerical personnel. The unit head and the veterans' service officers shall be veterans, as defined in section 27-103, or veterans who were awarded the armed forces expeditionary medal for service by the armed forces.

(2) (A) The unit head shall develop a training module on assisting and serving women veterans with regard to state or federal services or benefits and identifying and advising such veterans of community or nonprofit programs focused on assisting and serving such veterans.

Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

The unit head shall hold and provide instruction for an annual training session, in accordance with such module, to each veterans' services officer and any veterans' service contact person, as described in subsection (b) of section 27-135, as amended by this act, or representative from an Operation Academic Support for Incoming Service Members center at a public institution of higher education in this state.

(B) At least one of the service officers shall be a woman having a demonstrated interest in the concerns of women veterans, who shall be responsible for addressing those concerns, and, effective upon the next opening of a service officer position occurring on or after July 1, 2010, at least two of the service officers shall be individuals having bilingual proficiency in English and Spanish, within existing authorized positions. Each service officer shall (i) successfully complete a course in veterans' benefits within one year of commencement of employment, [and shall] (ii) attend the training session described in subparagraph (A) of this subdivision, and (iii) be assigned to one of the five congressional districts of the state.

(c) In addition to the powers and duties prescribed under section 4-8, the commissioner shall have the following powers and duties:

(1) To prepare studies and collect information concerning facilities and services available to members of the armed forces, veterans, their spouses or eligible dependents, including facilities and services for veterans who may have been exposed to a Vietnam herbicide during their periods of military service;

(2) To conduct interviews in the nursing homes or hospitals throughout the state to determine the number of veterans admitted and ascertaining which benefits such veterans are currently receiving and are entitled to receive;

Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

(3) To cooperate with service agencies and organizations throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been members of the armed forces, their spouses or eligible dependents, which will indicate the availability of: (A) Educational training and retraining facilities; (B) health, medical, rehabilitation and housing services and facilities; (C) employment and reemployment services; (D) provisions of federal, state and local laws affording financial rights, privileges and benefits; and (E) other matters of similar nature;

(4) To assist veterans, their spouses and eligible dependents and family members in the preparation, presentation, proof and establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits accruing to them under federal, state and local laws;

(5) To cooperate with all national, state and local governmental and private agencies securing or offering services or any benefits to veterans, their spouses or dependents;

(6) To develop and prepare a long-range plan and mission statement for the Veterans' Home and the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit;

(7) To review all appeals made by veterans, their spouses or eligible dependents or family members and render the final decision thereon regarding the denial of admission to any program or the refusal to render any service or benefit which is administered by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the discharge or transfer from any such program or any disciplinary action taken while participating in any such program; [and]

(8) If the Veterans' Home closes or ceases to provide housing to veterans, to provide or arrange for housing to any veteran residing at the home or the health care facility within the home on the date of such closure or on the date the Veterans' Home ceases to provide housing to

Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

veterans; and

(9) To publish on the Internet extensive and reliable data regarding women veterans, including, but not limited to, federal and state services and benefits, current challenges and notable women veterans and their contributions.

Sec. 2. Subsection (b) of section 27-135 of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

(b) Any city or town that (1) has not established its own local veterans' advisory committee separate from one or more other cities or towns pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, and (2) does not otherwise provide funding for a veterans' service officer shall designate a city or town employee to serve as a veterans' service contact person in such city or town. Any city or town employee designated as a veterans' service contact person shall carry out the duties described in subsection (a) of this section and may complete an annual training course conducted by the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit, as described in subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of section 27-102l, as amended by this act, or attend a training session conducted by the unit head of said unit, as described in subparagraph (A) of subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of said section.

Sec. 3. Subsection (a) of section 27-109a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

(a) The Department of Veterans' Affairs may establish and maintain, within available resources, a registry of data on members of the armed forces, as defined in section 27-103, who have completed a period of active service. The department may develop surveys for members or their health care providers to voluntarily provide data during or after

Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

such active service. The surveys and data shall be collected and maintained in accordance with the requirements of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-191) (HIPAA), as amended from time to time, or regulations adopted thereunder. The department may also create and release for radio and television broadcast noncommercial sustaining announcements to encourage veterans in the state to participate in such surveys, provide such data and otherwise enroll in such registry. For purposes of this section, "noncommercial sustaining announcement" means an announcement that airs during unsold commercial time donated by a broadcaster to a broadcasters' association and that is then made available to a state or federal government agency or nonprofit organization at a reduced rate for the promotion of specific public service programs or campaigns.

Sec. 4. Subsection (a) of section 27-100f of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective October 1, 2016*):

(a) (1) On or before July 1, 2012, the Department of Veterans' Affairs shall publish on the department's Internet web site an informational page listing any benefits, services or programs offered to veterans or their families by any state or federal agency, department or institution. The department shall maintain the informational page after said date and shall update the informational page annually. The department shall publish on the informational page any information concerning the eligibility requirements and application process for such benefits, services or programs, the name and contact information of any entity offering such benefits, services or programs, and a link to the Internet web site for such entity.

(2) The department shall also publish on the Internet content dedicated to matters of concern for women veterans, including, but not limited to, any relevant information, links to services and benefits for

Substitute Senate Bill No. 205

which women veterans may be eligible and contact information for the veterans' advocacy and assistance unit for purposes of providing front-line support of and assistance with women veterans issues.

Approved June 9, 2016