

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 915 Session of
2007

INTRODUCED BY BAKER, SCARNATI, PILEGGI, ARMSTRONG, ROBBINS,
TOMLINSON, PUNT, WAUGH, MELLOW, DINNIMAN, KITCHEN,
WASHINGTON, STACK, PIPPY, D. WHITE, BOSCOLA, COSTA,
GREENLEAF, MUSTO, RHOADES, TARTAGLIONE, BROWNE, ERICKSON,
FONTANA, KASUNIC, LOGAN, O'PAKE, WONDERLING, FERLO, ORIE,
RAFFERTY, BRUBAKER, CORMAN, EARLL, MADIGAN, McILHINNEY,
REGOLA, VANCE, M. WHITE, GORDNER, HUGHES, LAVALLE,
C. WILLIAMS, WOZNIAK, FUMO, PICCOLA, STOUT, EICHELBERGER AND
FOLMER, JUNE 30, 2007

REFERRED TO VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,
JUNE 30, 2007

AN ACT

1 Amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania
2 Consolidated Statutes, providing for the establishment of a
3 grant program for designated accredited veterans' service
4 organizations, for defraying the costs for wages, benefits,
5 training and equipment and for improving outreach and
6 delivery of services to Pennsylvania's veterans.

7 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
8 hereby enacts as follows:

9 Section 1. Title 51 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated
10 Statutes is amended by adding a section to read:

11 § 9304. Support for veterans' service officer programs.

12 (a) Award allocations.--From funds specifically appropriated
13 for this purpose, the department shall make grants to designated
14 veterans' service organizations to support veterans' service
15 officer programs. Grants made under this section shall be used
16 solely to support accredited veterans' service officers and the

1 associated costs, including:

2 (1) Wages, benefits, other compensation and related
3 personnel costs.

4 (2) Training provided by accredited veterans' service
5 advocacy staff.

6 (3) Equipment to be used by accredited veterans' service
7 officer staff.

8 (b) Goals.--The overall goals of this program shall be to
9 improve the coordination and distribution of veterans' benefits,
10 to maximize the effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars
11 and to increase veterans participation in available benefits
12 programs. To accomplish these goals, the designated veterans'
13 service organizations shall strive to improve the administration
14 and delivery of services to Pennsylvania's veterans by:

15 (1) Increasing interaction with the veterans' service
16 organizations and the United States Department of Veterans
17 Affairs in order to enhance the delivery of services to
18 Pennsylvania veterans.

19 (2) Seeking to increase the number of initial claims
20 filed with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs
21 on behalf of Pennsylvania veterans for service-related
22 disabilities and/or pension benefits.

23 (3) Developing methods to increase rates of recovery
24 paid by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to
25 Pennsylvania veterans.

26 (4) Expanding training opportunities for designated
27 veterans' service organizations and veterans' service
28 officers.

29 (5) Seeking to increase either the number or percentage
30 of Pennsylvania veterans enrolled in the Department of

1 Veterans Affairs health care system.

2 (6) Improving coordination among the veterans' service
3 organizations and with the department to assure an integrated
4 approach to claims processing.

5 (7) Improving outreach services to veterans throughout
6 Pennsylvania and its 67 counties.

7 (c) Eligibility.--The following veterans' service
8 organizations are designated to receive grants under this
9 program:

10 (1) The American Legion.

11 (2) AMVETS.

12 (3) Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

13 (4) Disabled American Veterans.

14 (5) The department may identify additional Pennsylvania
15 veterans' service organizations to receive grants under the
16 program when:

17 (i) The veterans' service organization is a member
18 of the State Veterans' Commission as listed in section
19 1702(b).

20 (ii) The veterans' service organization services as
21 an active participant of the State Veterans' Commission
22 abiding by the statutory rules and guidelines.

23 (d) Application for allocations.--Veterans' service
24 organizations eligible for funding under subsection (c) shall
25 submit their annual spending plans to the department for funding
26 consistent with the goals set forth in subsection (b).

27 (e) Amount of grants.--The department shall determine the
28 annual allocation to each of the designated veterans service
29 organizations based on the proposed spending plan for the
30 upcoming fiscal year as well as a consideration of actual

1 recoveries from the previous fiscal year. If the total
2 appropriation totals less than the collective spending plans,
3 the department shall prorate the allocations across the
4 organizations based on the spending plans and past performance.

5 (f) Procedures, policies and guidelines.--The department
6 shall establish procedures, policies, guidelines, forms and
7 reporting requirements necessary to carry out the purposes of
8 this program within 60 business days of the effective date of
9 this section. Procedures, policies, guidelines, forms and
10 reporting requirements established under this section shall be
11 submitted to the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness
12 Committee of the Senate and the Veterans Affairs and Emergency
13 Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives for their
14 review and comment.

15 (g) Administrative start-up.--The General Assembly shall
16 provide nominal funds to defray the department's administrative
17 and implementation oversight costs.

18 (h) Recapture of unused allocation.--A portion of an
19 allocation provided under subsection (d) which is not used by
20 the deadline set by the department, including any extension by
21 the department, shall be recaptured for reallocation by the
22 department in consultation with the Secretary of the Budget.

23 (i) Reporting requirements.--On or before October 1 of each
24 year, designated veterans service organizations participating in
25 the program established by this section shall file a written
26 report with the Adjutant General and the Deputy Adjutant General
27 for Veterans' Affairs and send copies to the chairman and
28 minority chairman of the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency
29 Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the chairman and
30 minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency

1 Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives and State
2 Veterans' Commission. The report shall contain the following
3 information:

4 (1) A description of all veterans service officer
5 activities, an accounting of recoveries and a listing of
6 volunteer hours for the preceding Commonwealth fiscal year.

7 (2) A proposed budget and spending plan for the
8 Commonwealth fiscal year beginning on July 1 of the year
9 following the filing of the report.

10 (3) An accounting of its expenditures from grants
11 awarded under this program, audited by a certified public
12 accountant for the preceding Commonwealth fiscal year.

13 (j) Review of reports.--The Veterans' Affairs and Emergency
14 Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the Veterans Affairs
15 and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of
16 Representatives shall annually review the reports filed by the
17 participating veterans service organizations.

18 (k) Audits.--The department or the Auditor General may
19 conduct such audits and reviews of the grant program hereby
20 established as the department or the Auditor General determines
21 to be necessary or appropriate. Copies of all audit reports or
22 reviews conducted by the department or the Auditor General shall
23 be made available to the chairman and minority chairman of the
24 Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the
25 Senate and the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans
26 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of
27 Representatives.

28 Section 2. This act shall apply to fiscal years beginning on
29 and after July 1, 2007, when and if funds are specifically
30 appropriated to support the grant program established by this

1 act.

2 Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.