

## 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, WOZNIAC, FUMO, PICCOLA, STOUT, EICHELBERGER AND  
FOLMER, JUNE 30, 2007

SENATOR BAKER, VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, AS  
AMENDED, SEPTEMBER 25, 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 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE VETERANS' SERVICE ←  
5 OFFICER GRANT ACCOUNT, for defraying the costs for wages,  
6 benefits, training and equipment and for improving outreach  
7 and delivery of services to Pennsylvania's veterans.

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

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

12 § 9304. Support for veterans' service officer programs.

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

1 solely to support accredited veterans' service officers and the  
2 associated costs, including:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

30 (5) Seeking to increase either the number or percentage

1 of Pennsylvania veterans enrolled in the Department of  
2 Veterans Affairs health care system.

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

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

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

11 (1) The American Legion.

12 (2) AMVETS.

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

14 (4) Disabled American Veterans.

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

18 (i) The veterans' service organization is a member  
19 of the State Veterans' Commission as listed in section  
20 1702(b).

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

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

28 (e) Amount of grants.--The department shall determine the  
29 annual allocation to each of the designated veterans service  
30 organizations based on the proposed spending plan for the

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

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

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

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

24 ~~(i)~~

25 (G) VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICER GRANT ACCOUNT.--A RESTRICTED <—  
26 ACCOUNT IS HEREBY CREATED IN THE STATE TREASURY WHICH SHALL BE  
27 KNOWN AS THE VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICER GRANT ACCOUNT. ALL MONEYS  
28 APPROPRIATED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR VETERANS' OUTREACH  
29 SERVICES SHALL BE PLACED IN THE ACCOUNT. FUNDS IN THIS ACCOUNT  
30 ARE HEREBY APPROPRIATED UPON APPROVAL OF THE GOVERNOR FOR

1 PAYMENT OF THE COSTS OF IMPLEMENTING THIS ACT.

2 (H) Reporting requirements.--On or before October 1 of each  
3 year, designated veterans service organizations participating in  
4 the program established by this section shall file a written  
5 report with the Adjutant General and the Deputy Adjutant General  
6 for Veterans' Affairs and send copies to the chairman and  
7 minority chairman of the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency  
8 Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the chairman and  
9 minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency  
10 Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives and State  
11 Veterans' Commission. The report shall contain the following  
12 information:

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

16 (2) A proposed budget and spending plan for the  
17 Commonwealth fiscal year beginning on July 1 of the year  
18 following the filing of the report.

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

22 ~~(j)~~ (I) Review of reports.--The Veterans' Affairs and <—  
23 Emergency Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the Veterans  
24 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of  
25 Representatives shall annually review the reports filed by the  
26 participating veterans service organizations.

27 ~~(k)~~ (J) Audits.--The department or the Auditor General may <—  
28 conduct such audits and reviews of the grant program hereby  
29 established as the department or the Auditor General determines  
30 to be necessary or appropriate. Copies of all audit reports or

1 reviews conducted by the department or the Auditor General shall  
2 be made available to the chairman and minority chairman of the  
3 Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the  
4 Senate and the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans  
5 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of  
6 Representatives.

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

11       Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.