

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, FOLMER AND A. WILLIAMS, JUNE 30, 2007

SENATOR ARMSTRONG, APPROPRIATIONS, RE-REPORTED AS AMENDED, OCTOBER 1, 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~~ GRANTS TO veterans' service officer
13 programs. <—

14 (a) Award allocations.--From funds specifically appropriated
15 for this purpose, the department shall make AWARD grants to <—
16 designated veterans' service organizations to support veterans'

1 service officer programs. Grants made AWARDED under this section <—  
2 shall be used solely to support accredited veterans' service  
3 officers and the associated costs, including:

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

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

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

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

17 (B) PROGRAM GOALS.--THE GOALS OF THE PROGRAM SHALL INCLUDE: <—

18 (1) IMPROVEMENT OF THE COORDINATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF  
19 VETERANS' BENEFITS;

20 (2) MAXIMIZATION OF THE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT USE OF  
21 TAXPAYER DOLLARS; AND

22 (3) INCREASING VETERANS' PARTICIPATION IN AVAILABLE  
23 BENEFITS PROGRAMS.

24 (C) USE OF GRANTS.--A DESIGNATED VETERANS' SERVICE  
25 ORGANIZATION SHALL USE GRANTS RECEIVED UNDER THIS SECTION TO  
26 IMPROVE THE ADMINISTRATION AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO  
27 PENNSYLVANIA'S VETERANS AND MEET THE GOALS SET FORTH IN  
28 PARAGRAPH (6) BY:

29 (1) Increasing interaction with the veterans' service  
30 organizations and the United States Department of Veterans

1 Affairs in order to enhance the delivery of services to  
2 Pennsylvania veterans.

3 (2) ~~Seeking to increase~~ INCREASING the number of initial <—  
4 claims filed with the United States Department of Veterans  
5 Affairs on behalf of Pennsylvania veterans for service-  
6 related disabilities ~~and/or~~ OR pension benefits. <—

7 (3) Developing methods to increase rates of recovery  
8 paid by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to  
9 Pennsylvania veterans.

10 (4) Expanding training opportunities for designated  
11 veterans' service organizations and veterans' service  
12 officers.

13 (5) ~~Seeking to increase~~ INCREASING either the number or <—  
14 percentage of Pennsylvania veterans enrolled in the  
15 Department of Veterans Affairs health care system.

16 (6) Improving coordination among the veterans' service  
17 organizations and with the department to assure an integrated  
18 approach to claims processing.

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

21 ~~(e)~~ (D) Eligibility.--The following veterans' service <—  
22 organizations are designated to receive grants under this  
23 program:

24 (1) The American Legion.

25 (2) AMVETS.

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

27 (4) Disabled American Veterans.

28 (5) The department may ~~identify~~ DESIGNATE additional <—  
29 Pennsylvania veterans' service organizations to receive  
30 grants under the program when:

1           (i) The veterans' service organization is a member  
2           of the State Veterans' Commission as listed in section  
3           1702(b).

4           (ii) The veterans' service organization services as  
5           an active participant of IN the State Veterans' <—  
6           Commission abiding by the statutory rules and guidelines.

7           ~~(d)~~ (E) Application for allocations.--Veterans' service <—  
8           organizations eligible for funding under subsection (c) shall  
9           ~~submit their annual spending plans to the department for funding~~ <—  
10           SUBMIT AN ANNUAL SPENDING PLAN TO THE DEPARTMENT IN ORDER TO BE <—  
11           ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE A GRANT UNDER THIS SECTION consistent with  
12           the goals set forth in subsection (b) SUBSECTIONS (B) AND (C). <—

13           ~~(e)~~ (F) Amount of grants.--The department shall determine <—  
14           the annual allocation to each of the designated veterans service  
15           organizations based on the proposed spending plan SPENDING PLAN <—  
16           SUBMITTED UNDER SUBSECTION (E) for the upcoming fiscal year as <—  
17           ~~well as a consideration of actual~~ UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR AND ON <—  
18           ACTUAL recoveries from the previous fiscal year. If the total  
19           appropriation totals less than the collective spending plans,  
20           the department shall prorate the allocations across the AMONG <—  
21           ELIGIBLE organizations based on the spending plans PLAN and past <—  
22           performance.

23           ~~(f)~~ (G) Procedures, policies and guidelines.--The department <—  
24           shall establish procedures, policies, guidelines, forms and  
25           reporting requirements necessary to carry out the purposes of  
26           this program within 60-business 45 days of the effective date of <—  
27           this section. Procedures, policies, guidelines, forms and  
28           reporting requirements established under this section shall be  
29           submitted to the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness  
30           Committee of the Senate and the Veterans Affairs and Emergency

1 Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives for their  
2 review and comment.

3 ~~(g) Veterans' Service Officer Grant Account. A restricted~~ ←  
4 ~~account is hereby created in the State Treasury which shall be~~  
5 ~~known as the Veterans' Service Officer Grant Account. All moneys~~  
6 ~~appropriated by the General Assembly for veterans' outreach~~  
7 ~~services shall be placed in the account. Funds in this account~~  
8 ~~are hereby appropriated upon approval of the Governor for~~  
9 ~~payment of the costs of implementing this act.~~

10 (h) Reporting requirements.--On or before October 1 of each  
11 year, designated veterans service organizations participating in  
12 the program established by this section shall file a written  
13 report with the Adjutant General and the Deputy Adjutant General  
14 for Veterans' Affairs and send copies to the chairman and  
15 minority chairman of the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency  
16 Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the chairman and  
17 minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency  
18 Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives and State  
19 Veterans' Commission. The report shall contain the following  
20 information:

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

24 (2) A proposed budget and spending plan for the  
25 Commonwealth fiscal year beginning on July 1 of the year  
26 following the filing of the report.

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

30 (i) Review of reports.--The Veterans' Affairs and Emergency

1 Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the Veterans Affairs  
2 and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of  
3 Representatives shall annually review the reports filed by the ←  
4 participating veterans service organizations.

5 (j) Audits.--The department or the Auditor General may  
6 conduct such audits and reviews of the grant program hereby  
7 established as the department or the Auditor General determines  
8 to be necessary or appropriate. Copies of all audit reports or  
9 reviews conducted by the department or the Auditor General shall  
10 be made available to the chairman and minority chairman of the  
11 Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the  
12 Senate and the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans  
13 Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of  
14 Representatives.

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

19 Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.