

AN ACT

relating to establishing a veterans services coordinator for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice and a veterans reentry dorm program for certain state jail defendants confined by the department.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS:

SECTION 1. Subchapter A, Chapter 501, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 501.025 to read as follows:

Sec. 501.025. VETERANS SERVICES COORDINATOR. (a) The department shall establish a veterans services coordinator to coordinate responses to the needs of veterans under the supervision of the department, including veterans who are released on parole or mandatory supervision. The veterans services coordinator, with the cooperation of the community justice assistance division, shall provide information to community supervision and corrections departments to help those departments coordinate responses to the needs of veterans placed on community supervision. The veterans services coordinator shall coordinate veterans' services for all of the department's divisions.

(b) The veterans services coordinator, in collaboration with the attorney general's office, shall provide each incarcerated veteran a child support modification application.

SECTION 2. Subchapter B, Chapter 507, Government Code, is amended by adding Section 507.034 to read as follows:

1 Sec. 507.034. VETERANS REENTRY DORM PROGRAM. (a) The
2 department, in coordination with the Texas Veterans Commission,
3 shall establish and administer a voluntary rehabilitation and
4 transition program for defendants confined in state jail felony
5 facilities:

6 (1) who are veterans of the United States armed
7 forces, including veterans of the reserves, national guard, or
8 state guard; and

9 (2) who suffer from a brain injury, a mental illness, a
10 mental disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder, or
11 substance abuse, or were victims of military sexual trauma, as
12 defined by Section 124.002, that:

13 (A) occurred during or resulted from their
14 military service; and

15 (B) may have contributed to their criminal
16 activity.

17 (b) The program established under this section must:

18 (1) provide for investigating and verifying the
19 veteran status of each defendant confined in a state jail felony
20 facility by using data made available from the Veterans Reentry
21 Search Service (VRSS) operated by the United States Department of
22 Veterans Affairs or a similar service;

23 (2) be available to male defendants and, if resources
24 are available, female defendants;

25 (3) include provisions regarding interviewing and
26 selecting defendants for participation in the program;

27 (4) allow a defendant to decline participation in the

1 program or to withdraw from the program at any time;

2 (5) house defendants participating in the program in
3 housing that is designed to mimic the squadron structure familiar
4 to veterans;

5 (6) coordinate and provide available services and
6 programming approved by the department, including:

7 (A) individual and group peer support
8 programming, as appropriate;

9 (B) access to military trauma-informed licensed
10 mental health professional counseling, as appropriate;

11 (C) evidence-based rehabilitation programming;
12 and

13 (D) reemployment services; and

14 (7) to the extent feasible, not later than the 60th day
15 before the date a defendant participating in the program is
16 scheduled for release or discharge from the department:

17 (A) match the defendant with community-based
18 veteran peer support services to assist the defendant in
19 transitioning into the community; and

20 (B) transfer the defendant to a state jail felony
21 facility located near the defendant's home community, or the
22 community in which the defendant intends to reside after the
23 defendant's release or discharge, to begin establishing transition
24 relationships with community-based veteran peer support service
25 providers and family members.

26 SECTION 3. This Act takes effect September 1, 2017.

President of the Senate

Speaker of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 865 was passed by the House on April 25, 2017, by the following vote: Yeas 113, Nays 30, 2 present, not voting.

Chief Clerk of the House

I certify that H.B. No. 865 was passed by the Senate on May 24, 2017, by the following vote: Yeas 29, Nays 2.

Secretary of the Senate

APPROVED: _____

Date

Governor