

AN ACT

relating to required training for veterans county service officers and assistant veterans county service officers.

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

SECTION 1. Sections 434.038(a), (b), (c), and (e), Government Code, are amended to read as follows:

(a) An officer shall, within the time after the date of the officer's appointment that the commission prescribes, complete a course of initial training provided by the Texas Veterans Commission or approved under Subsection (e)(5). The commission shall issue the officer a certificate of training after completion of all [the] initial training requirements established by the commission under this section ~~[course]~~. To maintain certification, the officer shall complete continuing training ~~[to the extent]~~ required by the commission that is approved under Subsection (e)(5) or provided by the commission. An officer must maintain certification to remain in office.

(b) The commission may ~~[shall]~~ provide, at commission expense, the initial and continuing training required by this section at least once each year. If state funds are appropriated for that purpose, the commission shall reimburse an officer's travel and lodging expenses incurred in attending training provided by the commission. The commission shall make the reimbursement in the manner prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to

1 state employees.

2 (c) The commissioners court of an officer's county shall
3 reimburse an officer's travel and lodging expenses incurred in
4 attending [~~commission~~] training required under this section that is
5 approved under Subsection (e)(5) [~~unless state funds are~~
6 ~~appropriated for that purpose. If state funds are appropriated,~~
7 ~~the commission shall make the reimbursement in the manner~~
8 ~~prescribed for the reimbursement of these expenses to state~~
9 ~~employees].~~

10 (e) The commission shall:

11 (1) maintain course materials and examinations in a
12 central location and provide county service offices and commission
13 field staff with access to the course materials on the commission's
14 Internet website;

15 (2) regularly update course materials, training
16 curriculum, and examinations after consulting with:

17 (A) the United States Department of Veterans
18 Affairs to ensure the course materials, training curriculum, and
19 examinations are accurate and meet applicable United States
20 Department of Veterans Affairs requirements; and

21 (B) accredited county service officers to ensure
22 the materials, training curriculum, and examinations include
23 issues developing at the county level;

24 (3) develop a training handbook containing
25 instruction and case studies addressing:

26 (A) general assistance techniques, including how
27 to provide general information regarding state and federal benefits

1 and referrals for other services and to other agencies, and general
2 information regarding state and federal benefits;

3 (B) basic counseling approaches for assisting
4 veterans, their family members, and other eligible dependents
5 filing benefit claims;

6 (C) basic information on United States
7 Department of Veterans Affairs processes and procedures, including
8 how to accurately complete claims and appeals forms and how to
9 support claims;

10 (D) methods of collecting required documentation
11 and developing claims and appeals;

12 (E) methods of documenting progress and updating
13 a veteran's, a veteran's family member's, or another eligible
14 dependent's case information;

15 (F) methods of assisting veterans, their family
16 members, or other eligible dependents in pursuing appeals,
17 including offering case knowledge in appeals hearings; and

18 (G) methods of representing veterans, their
19 family members, or other eligible dependents during appeals
20 hearings; ~~and~~

21 (4) coordinate with the Department of State Health
22 Services to incorporate a suicide prevention component as part of
23 the accreditation training and examination; and

24 (5) approve training provided by public or private
25 entities to fulfill initial and continuing training requirements
26 established by the commission under this section.

27 SECTION 2. This Act takes effect September 1, 2017.

President of the Senate

Speaker of the House

I hereby certify that S.B. No. 544 passed the Senate on April 24, 2017, by the following vote: Yeas 30, Nays 0.

Secretary of the Senate

I hereby certify that S.B. No. 544 passed the House on May 24, 2017, by the following vote: Yeas 146, Nays 0, two present not voting.

Chief Clerk of the House

Approved:

Date

Governor