

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
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FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

House Bill 1275 (Delegate Vogt, *et al.*)
Health and Government Operations

**State Government - Department of Veterans Affairs - Veterans' Services
Specialists**

This bill requires each unit of State government to (1) designate an employee to be a “veterans’ services specialist” whose duties include the coordination of veterans’ services with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA); (2) provide MDVA with any nonprotected or nonprivate information about services the unit provides to veterans; and (3) post on the unit’s website all services available for veterans from the unit, the contact information for the unit’s veterans’ services specialist, and a link to MDVA with the contact information for the director of the Outreach and Advocacy Program within MDVA. To the extent practicable, the bill encourages units to designate a veteran as the unit’s veterans’ services specialist. The bill also requires MDVA to (1) coordinate a meeting, on at least a quarterly basis, with governmental units to discuss the implementation of the bill’s requirements and (2) report on the implementation of the bill’s requirements to the Governor and the General Assembly by January 15 each year.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: It is assumed that the designation of an employee as a veterans’ services specialist within units of State government, as well as any additional coordination with MDVA and participation in annual training, can be accomplished with existing resources – assuming the employee is not dedicated exclusively to such coordination and at least one affected unit assigns existing staff who is not a veteran. Several units already coordinate with MDVA and participate in training. MDVA can coordinate the quarterly meeting and handle the bill’s reporting requirements with existing resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: The bill is not anticipated to affect local government finances or operations.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: “Specialist” means an employee designated by a governmental unit who is responsible for responding to and assisting veterans who are employed by the unit or who contact the unit for assistance. The veterans’ services specialist must (1) coordinate the provision of veterans’ services available through the unit with MDVA and (2) attend annual training that MDVA provides concerning the coordination of veterans’ services.

When a veteran requests services, a governmental unit that does not provide services to veterans must direct the veteran to contact MDVA and provide the veteran with MDVA’s contact information.

Current Law: Generally, for the purposes of reaching any veteran, veteran’s dependent, or veteran’s survivor in need of assistance in obtaining services or benefits, the director of MDVA is required to develop and implement an outreach plan. The director must also develop mechanisms for outreach to be disseminated by direct mail and through community-based veterans’ organizations, MDVA, the Department of Human Resources, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), and any other State agency or unit the director considers appropriate.

Background: Several units of State government already have offices or individuals dedicated to working with veterans in the State and coordinating with MDVA.

For example, Maryland’s Commitment to Veterans (MCV) is a DHMH program devoted to total wellness for veterans and their families. MCV employs regional resource coordinators who provide assistance to veterans and their families to support a healthy transition to civilian life. With support from DHMH’s Behavioral Health Administration, MCV also provides a connection to wellness services, with an emphasis on mental health and substance use disorder services. MCV regularly coordinates with MDVA.

Additionally, the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services advised (in response to similar legislation) that its Human Resources Services Division currently has programs in place dealing with outreach to veterans, with a particular emphasis on recruiting.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: Although designated as a cross file, SB 857 (Senators Smith and Waugh - Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs) is not identical.

Information Source(s): Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Budget and Management; Department of Legislative Services

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mm/ljm

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