

ASSEMBLY MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR
ASSEMBLY, No. 2579

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 15, 2023

The Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee reports favorably Assembly Committee Substitute for Assembly No. 2579.

This committee substitute creates, in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, a Military and Veterans Affairs Oversight Board. The board will be responsible for the oversight of: (1) all veteran service officers; (2) each board, council, commission, program, and such similar entity, within the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; and (3) all programs, benefits, and services provided specifically to military service members, veterans, and their families by any State Executive Branch department, division, commission, or agency.

The board will consist of the head of each veteran organization in the State with a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code.

The heads of the American Legion Department of New Jersey, the Disabled American Veterans Department of New Jersey, and the Department of New Jersey Veterans of Foreign Wars will serve as co-chairs for the first three meetings. By the conclusion of the third meeting, the members will vote to elect a chair and vice-chair. The chair and vice-chair will serve for a term of three years.

Each member of the board will be entitled to be reimbursed for traveling and other expenses necessarily incurred in the performance of their duties. In addition, each member will receive a per diem allowance of \$1,000 for each monthly meeting attended. The failure of a member of the board to participate in a minimum number of monthly meetings will result in removal of that board member.

Each Executive Branch department, division, commission, and agency, as well as the veteran service officers, and each board, council, commission, and such similar entity, within the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will appoint a liaison to the board. The liaison will act as the point of contact to the board. Each liaison will attend the monthly meetings of the board. The failure to participate in a minimum number of meetings will result in removal of that liaison.

The liaison will provide a biannual report to the board. The report will describe in detail such programs, benefits, and services provided,

and such other information deemed necessary and appropriate by the board. Each Executive branch department, division, commission, and agency will also annually present to the board that portion of their State and federal, if applicable, budget that represents those programs, benefits, and services.

The bill also requires the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, upon request and when available, to provide copies of reports of the contractor relating to military mission maintenance and growth, subject to the provisions of the law commonly referred to as the Open Public Records Act.

Under the bill, the responsibilities of the board will be to coordinate and implement a strategic plan to ensure military service members, veterans, and their families are made aware of the programs, benefits, and services available to them, and to ensure that all State departments, divisions, commissions, and agencies are effectively delivering programs, benefits, and services that are comprehensive to military service members, veterans, and their families in this State.

The board will also conduct an analysis of the various programs, benefits, and services provided by the State specifically to military service members, veterans, and their families, and evaluate those programs, benefits, and services to assess their effectiveness.

In addition, the board will analyze and evaluate with regard to veterans who reside in the State: accessibility of the programs, benefits, or services; educational, job skills, employment, and business opportunities; physical and behavioral health and long-term healthcare options; criminal justice issues; housing opportunities and homelessness; and special needs as determined by the board.

The bill requires the board to provide a report detailing a strategic plan based upon comprehensive data acquired through engagement with State departments, divisions, commissions, and agencies, and military service members, veterans, and their families.

The board will develop recommendations to be submitted to the Governor and the Legislature to address any deficiencies in the provision of programs, benefits, and services specifically to military service members, veterans, and their families in this State. The recommendations will address specifically whether the existing State programs, benefits, and services are adequate to meet the existing needs of military service members, veterans, and their families; are being used to fulfill objectives in a manner that complements and leverages State, federal, and private resources; and how they may more effectively serve all current and future military service members, veterans, and their families in the State of New Jersey.

Under the bill, the board will prepare and submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature within nine months of the organizational meeting of the board. Thereafter, the board will prepare and submit annual reports to the Governor and the Legislature containing its findings, activities, and recommendations, including any

recommendations for administrative and legislative action that it deems appropriate.

All reports of the board will be prominently posted on the website of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

The Adjutant General of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs will include in the annual budget request of the department a request for sufficient funds to effectuate the purposes of the bill.