

084775340

**SENATE BILL NO. 760**

Offered January 18, 2008

A *BILL to amend and reenact §§ 2.2-2001, 2.2-2004, 2.2-2452, 2.2-2681, 2.2-2682, 2.2-2715, and 2.2-2716 of the Code of Virginia, relating to veterans services in the Commonwealth.*

Patrons—Wagner, Barker, Deeds, Edwards, Hanger, Houck, Puller, Ruff, Stosch and Ticer

Referred to Committee on General Laws and Technology

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. That §§ 2.2-2001, 2.2-2004, 2.2-2452, 2.2-2681, 2.2-2682, 2.2-2715, and 2.2-2716 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:**

§ 2.2-2001. Administrative responsibilities of the Department.

A. The Department shall be responsible for the establishment, operation, administration, and maintenance of offices and programs related to services for *Virginia-domiciled* veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their ~~Virginia-domiciled~~ *surviving* spouses, orphans, and dependents. Such services shall include, but not be limited to, benefits claims processing and all medical care centers and cemeteries for veterans owned and operated by the Commonwealth. *As used in this section, "veteran" means any person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released from such service under conditions other than dishonorable.*

B. *The Department shall establish guidelines for the determination of eligibility for Virginia-domiciled veterans and their spouses, orphans, and dependents for participation in programs and benefits administered by the Department. Such guidelines shall meet the intent of the federal statutes and regulations pertaining to the administration of federal programs supporting active duty veterans and their spouses, orphans, and dependents.*

C. The Department shall adopt reasonable regulations to implement a program to certify, upon request of the small business owner, that he holds a "service disabled veteran" status.

"Service disabled veteran" means a veteran who (i) served on active duty in the United States military ground, naval, or air service, (ii) was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable, and (iii) has a service-connected disability rating fixed by the United States Veterans Administration of (a) 50% or greater or (b) 10% or greater if the service-connected disability is combat related.

"Service disabled veteran business" means a business concern that is at least 51% owned by one or more service disabled veterans or, in the case of a corporation, partnership, or limited liability company or other entity, at least 51% of the equity ownership interest in the corporation, partnership, or limited liability company or other entity is owned by one or more individuals who are service disabled veterans and both the management and daily business operations are controlled by one or more individuals who are service disabled veterans.

§ 2.2-2004. Additional powers and duties of Commissioner.

The Commissioner shall have the following powers and duties related to veterans services:

1. Perform cost-benefit and value analysis of (i) existing programs and services, and (ii) new programs and services before establishing and implementing them;

2. Seek alternative funding sources for the Department's veterans service programs;

3. Cooperate with all relevant entities of the federal government, including, but not limited to, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the United States Department of Labor in matters concerning veterans benefits and services;

4. Appoint a full-time coordinator to collaborate with the Joint Leadership Council of Veteran Service Organizations created in § 2.2-2681 on ways to provide both direct and indirect support of ongoing veterans programs, and to determine and address future veterans needs and concerns;

5. Initiate, conduct, and issue special studies on matters pertaining to veterans needs and priorities, as determined necessary by the Commissioner;

6. Evaluate veterans service efforts, practices, and programs of the agencies, political subdivisions or other entities and organizations of the government of the Commonwealth and make recommendations to the Secretary of ~~Administration~~ *Public Safety*, the Governor, and the General Assembly on ways to increase awareness of the services available to veterans or improve veterans services;

7. Assist entities of state government and political subdivisions of the Commonwealth in enhancing their efforts to provide services to veterans, *to those members of the Virginia National Guard and Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves who qualify for veteran status, and to their immediate*

INTRODUCED

SB760

59 *families*, including the dissemination of relevant materials and the rendering of technical or other advice;  
60 8. Assist counties, cities, and towns of the Commonwealth in the development, implementation, and  
61 review of local veterans services programs as part of the state program and establish as necessary, in  
62 consultation with the Board of Veterans Services and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service  
63 Organizations, volunteer local and regional advisory committees to assist and support veterans service  
64 efforts;

65 9. Review the activities, roles, and contributions of various entities and organizations to the  
66 Commonwealth's veterans services programs and report on or before December 1 of each year in writing  
67 to the Governor and General Assembly on the status, progress, and prospects of veterans services in the  
68 Commonwealth, including performance measures and outcomes of veterans services programs;

69 10. Recommend to the Secretary of ~~Administration~~ *Public Safety*, the Governor, and the General  
70 Assembly any corrective measures, policies, procedures, plans, and programs to make ~~service services~~ to  
71 *Virginia-domiciled* veterans and their ~~surviving~~ spouses, orphans, and dependents as efficient and  
72 effective as practicable;

73 11. Design, implement, administer, and review special programs or projects needed to promote  
74 veterans services in the Commonwealth;

75 12. Integrate veterans services activities into the framework of economic development activities in  
76 general;

77 13. Manage operational funds using accepted accounting principles and practices in order to provide  
78 for a sum sufficient to ensure continued, uninterrupted operations;

79 14. Engage Department personnel in training and educational activities aimed at enhancing veterans  
80 services; and

81 15. Develop a strategic plan to ensure efficient and effective utilization of resources, programs, and  
82 services; and

83 16. *Certify eligibility for the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program and*  
84 *perform other duties related to the Program as provided in § 23-7.4:1.*

85 § 2.2-2452. Board of Veterans Services; membership; terms; quorum; compensation; staff.

86 A. The Board of Veterans Services (the Board) is established as a policy board, within the meaning  
87 of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of state government. The Board shall have a total membership of  
88 19 members that shall consist of five legislative members, 11 nonlegislative citizen members, and three  
89 ex officio members. Members shall be appointed as follows: three members of the House of Delegates  
90 to be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates in accordance with the principles of  
91 proportional representation contained in the Rules of the House of Delegates; two members of the  
92 Senate to be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules; and 11 nonlegislative citizen members to be  
93 appointed by the Governor. The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services shall serve ex  
94 officio with full voting privileges; and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Veterans Services  
95 Foundation and the Chairman of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations shall  
96 serve ex officio without voting privileges. Nonlegislative citizen members of the Board shall be citizens  
97 of the Commonwealth.

98 In making appointments, the Governor shall endeavor to ensure a balanced geographical  
99 representation on the Board while at the same time selecting appointees of such qualifications and  
100 experience as will allow them to provide expertise and insight into:

101 1. Best practices in benefits claims services, medical and health care management, or cemetery  
102 operations;

103 2. Performance measurements and general management principles; and

104 3. Nonprofit volunteer operations and management.

105 Each of the three areas of expertise shall be represented on the Board by at least two different  
106 appointees per area of expertise in order to allow for the Board to be capable of developing reasonable  
107 and effective policy recommendations related to the services provided to veterans of the armed forces of  
108 the United States and their Virginia-domiciled surviving spouses, orphans, and dependents by the  
109 Department of Veterans Services.

110 Legislative members and the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services shall serve terms  
111 coincident with their terms of office. After the initial staggering of terms, nonlegislative citizen members  
112 shall be appointed for a term of four years. Appointments to fill vacancies, other than by expiration of a  
113 term, shall be for the unexpired terms. All members may be reappointed. However, no House member  
114 shall serve more than four consecutive two-year terms, no Senate member shall serve more than two  
115 consecutive four-year terms, and no nonlegislative citizen member shall serve more than two consecutive  
116 four-year terms.

117 The remainder of any term to which a member is appointed to fill a vacancy shall not constitute a  
118 term in determining the member's eligibility for reappointment. Vacancies shall be filled in the same  
119 manner as the original appointments.

120 B. The Board shall select a chairman from its membership and, pursuant to rules adopted by it, may

elect one of its members as vice-chairman. The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services shall not be eligible to serve as chairman. The Board shall also elect one of its members as secretary. The Board shall meet at least three times a year at such times as it deems appropriate or on call of the chairman. A majority of the members of the Board shall constitute a quorum.

C. The Board shall be organized with at least three ~~subcommittees~~ *standing committees* that shall be responsible for (i) veterans benefits, (ii) veterans care services, and (iii) veterans cemeteries.

D. The Department of Veterans Services shall provide staff to the Board.

§ 2.2-2681. Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations; membership; terms; chairman; quorum; compensation.

A. The Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the Council) is established as an advisory council, within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of state government. The Council shall be composed of one representative from each qualifying veterans service organization to be appointed by the Governor, the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services, and the ~~Chairman~~ *Chairmen* of the Board of Veterans Services *and the Veterans Services Foundation* who shall serve as nonvoting ex officio members. Each veterans service organization representative may designate an alternate to attend meetings of the Council in the absence of such representative.

Qualifying veterans service organizations shall be (i) composed principally of and controlled by veterans of the United States Armed Forces, (ii) a registered nonprofit organization in good standing, incorporated for the purpose of promoting programs designed to assist veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their Virginia-domiciled surviving spouses, orphans, and dependents, and (iii) active and in good standing with its parent national organization, if such a parent organization exists.

B. Voting members shall be appointed for terms of three years. Appointments to fill vacancies shall be for the unexpired terms. No person shall be eligible to serve for or during more than two successive three-year terms. Each qualifying veterans service organization shall be responsible for recommending a member for appointment to the Council by the Governor.

C. The Council shall annually elect its chairman and vice-chairman from among its members. The Council shall develop and adopt its own charter, and shall develop and adopt a mission and vision statement in consultation with the Department of Veterans Services. A majority of the voting members of the Council shall constitute a quorum.

D. The Council shall meet at least four times per year. Additional meetings shall be subject to majority approval by the members of the Council.

E. Members of the Council shall not receive any compensation, but shall be reimbursed for reasonable and necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties as provided in § 2.2-2825.

§ 2.2-2682. Powers and duties.

A. The Council shall have the following powers and duties:

1. Advise the Department of Veterans Services regarding (i) methods of providing support for ongoing veterans services and programs, and (ii) addressing veterans issues on an ongoing basis;

2. Recommend issues that may potentially impact veterans of the armed forces of the United States and their Virginia-domiciled surviving spouses, orphans, and dependents;

3. Advise the Department of Veterans Services and the Board of Veterans Services on matters of concern to *Virginia-domiciled* veterans and their ~~Virginia-domiciled~~ *surviving* spouses, orphans, and dependents;

4. Promote and support existing veterans services and programs;

5. Recommend and promote implementation of new efficient and effective administrative initiatives that enhance existing veterans services and programs or provide for necessary veterans services and programs not currently provided; and

6. Maintain a nonpartisan approach to maintaining and improving veterans services and programs in the Commonwealth.

B. The chairman shall report to the Commissioner and the Board of Veterans Services the results of its meetings and submit an annual report on or before November 30 of each year.

C. The Council may apply for funds from the Veterans Services Foundation to enable it to better carry out its objectives. The Council shall not impose unreasonable burdens or costs in connection with requests of agencies.

§ 2.2-2715. Veterans Services Foundation; purpose; membership; terms; compensation; staff.

A. The Veterans Services Foundation (the Foundation) is established to serve as ~~an advisory foundation, within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, a body politic and corporate supporting the Department of Veterans Services~~ in the executive branch of state government. The Foundation shall be governed and administered by a board of trustees ~~for the purpose of providing to provide~~ funding for veteran services and programs in the Commonwealth through the Veterans Services Fund (the Fund). The Foundation shall submit a quarterly report to the Commissioner of Veterans Services on the Foundation's funding levels and services.

182 B. The Foundation *board of trustees* shall consist of the Commissioner of Veterans Services and the  
183 ~~Chairman~~ *Chairmen* of the Board of Veterans Services *and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans*  
184 *Services Organizations*, who shall serve as ex officio voting members, and eight nonlegislative citizens  
185 appointed by the Governor, subject to confirmation by the General Assembly. A majority of the trustees  
186 shall be active or retired chairmen, chief executive officers, or chief financial officers for large private  
187 corporations or nonprofit organizations. Trustees appointed by the Governor shall, insofar as possible, be  
188 veterans.

189 Initial appointments by the Governor shall be staggered as follows: two members for a term of one  
190 year, three members for a term of two years, and three members for a term of four years. Thereafter,  
191 members shall be appointed for a term of three years. Appointments to fill vacancies, other than by  
192 expiration of a term, shall be for the unexpired terms. All members may be reappointed. However, no  
193 member shall serve more than two consecutive three-year terms. The remainder of any term to which a  
194 member is appointed to fill a vacancy shall not constitute a term in determining the member's eligibility  
195 for reappointment. Vacancies shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments. Any  
196 member of the Board of Trustees may be removed by the Governor at his pleasure.

197 C. Trustees shall be reimbursed for their actual expenses incurred while attending meetings of the  
198 trustees or performing other duties. However, such reimbursement shall not exceed the per diem rate  
199 established for members of the General Assembly pursuant to § 30-19.12.

200 D. The Secretary of Public Safety shall designate a state agency to provide the Foundation with  
201 administrative and other services.

202 E. The trustees shall adopt bylaws governing their organization and procedures and may amend the  
203 same. The trustees shall elect from their number a chairman and such other officers as their bylaws may  
204 provide.

205 F. Any person designated by the board of trustees to handle the funds of the Foundation or the Fund  
206 shall give bond, with corporate surety, in a penalty fixed by the Governor, conditioned upon the faithful  
207 discharge of his duties. Any premium on the bond shall be paid from funds available to the Foundation.

208 § 2.2-2716. Authority of Foundation.

209 The Foundation has the authority to:

210 1. Administer the Veterans Services Fund and make expenditures from the Fund to the Department  
211 of Veterans Services to provide supplemental funding for the Department's services and programs;

212 2. Accept, hold, and administer gifts and bequests of money, securities, or other property, absolutely  
213 or in trust, for the purposes for which the Foundation is created;

214 3. Enter into contracts and execute all instruments necessary and appropriate to carry out the  
215 Foundation's purposes;

216 4. Take such actions as may be reasonably necessary to seek, promote, and stimulate contributions  
217 for the Fund;

218 5. ~~Make recommendations concerning~~ *Develop* other possible dedicated revenue sources for the Fund;  
219 and

220 6. Perform any lawful acts necessary or appropriate to carry out the purposes of the Foundation.