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HOUSE BILL NO. 1577

Offered January 14, 2015

Prefiled January 7, 2015

A BILL to amend and reenact § 2.2-2001.2 of the Code of Virginia and to amend the Code of Virginia by adding a section numbered 2.2-2001.2:1, relating to Veteran Employment Grant Fund and Program.

Patrons—Watts, Murphy and Simon

Referred to Committee on General Laws

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 2.2-2001.2 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted and that the Code of Virginia is amended by adding a section numbered 2.2-2001.2:1 as follows:

§ 2.2-2001.2. Programs to create employment opportunities for veterans.

The Department shall ~~develop~~ *establish* a comprehensive program to ~~reduce~~ ~~unemployment~~ ~~among~~ *create employment opportunities for* veterans by assisting businesses to attract, hire, train, and retain veterans. Such program shall promote strategies for connecting employers to qualified veterans and include (i) a workforce ~~assessment~~ *education* and training program for participating employers ~~and~~, (ii) a certification process for participating employers with the objective of setting measurable goals for hiring and retaining veterans, *and (iii) a process to recognize employers who meet goals for hiring and retaining veterans*.

§ 2.2-2001.2:1. Veteran Employment Grant Fund and Program.

A. From such funds as may be appropriated by the General Assembly and any gifts, grants, or donations from public or private sources, there is hereby created in the state treasury a special nonreverting permanent fund to be known as the Veteran Employment Grant Fund (the Fund), to be administered by the Department of Veterans Services (the Department). The Fund shall be established on the books of the Comptroller. Interest earned on moneys in the Fund shall remain in the Fund and be credited to it. Any moneys remaining in the Fund, including interest thereon, at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the general fund but shall remain in the Fund. Moneys in the Fund shall be used solely for the purposes of providing grants to businesses who meet goals, approved by the Department, for hiring and retaining veterans. Expenditures and disbursements from the Fund shall be made by the State Treasurer on warrants issued by the Comptroller upon written request signed by the Commissioner of the Department. Grants from the Fund shall be made only to applicants to the Veteran Employment Grant Program pursuant to subsection C.

B. As used in this section:

"Full-time job" means employment of an indefinite duration for which the employer pays the wages and standard fringe benefits for its employee, requiring a minimum of either (i) 35 hours of the employee's time a week for the entire normal year of the employer's operations, which normal year shall consist of at least 48 weeks or (ii) 1,680 hours per year. Seasonal or temporary positions shall not qualify as full-time jobs.

"Prevailing average wage" means that amount determined by the Virginia Employment Commission to be the average wage paid workers in the city or county of the Commonwealth in which the employee works. The prevailing average wage shall be determined without regard to any fringe benefits.

"Veteran" means an individual who has served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable.

C. Beginning July 1, 2016, any business with 300 or fewer employees that has been certified by the Department pursuant to § 2.2-2001.2 may apply for a grant from the Fund for a veteran who (i) was hired by the business after July 1, 2015; (ii) was hired within one year of the date of his discharge from active military, naval, or air service; (iii) has been continuously employed by the business in a full-time job for at least one year; and (iv) has been paid at least the prevailing average wage.

The Department shall award a grant of $1,000 per qualifying business, subject to the following: (a) the total amount awarded to any business shall not exceed $10,000 per fiscal year and (b) each business may receive only one grant award per qualifying veteran.

D. Grants shall be issued in the order that each completed eligible application is received. In the event that the amount of eligible grants requested in a fiscal year exceeds the funds available in the Fund, such grants shall be paid in the next fiscal year in which funds are available.

E. The Department shall develop guidelines setting forth the general requirements of receiving certification pursuant to § 2.2-2001.2 and for applying and qualifying for a grant pursuant to this

section.