

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 243

Directing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to review the Department of Veterans Services. Report.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 19, 2015
 Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 17, 2015

WHEREAS, the Department of Veterans Services (the Department) was established by the Virginia General Assembly in 2003 under the Secretary of Administration; and

WHEREAS, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission has not previously undertaken a review of the Department, yet the Department is now reporting to the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, its third Secretariat since 2003; and

WHEREAS, the Department is 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 eligible spouses, orphans, and dependents, including, but not limited to, benefits claims processing and all medical care centers and veterans cemeteries owned and operated by the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Department is organized into six service delivery sections—Benefits, Veterans Education Training and Employment, Veterans Care Centers, Veterans Cemeteries, the Virginia War Memorial, and the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program; and

WHEREAS, the Department operates 23 benefits services offices throughout the Commonwealth where veterans and their dependents receive free assistance in developing and filing claims for federal veterans benefits; and

WHEREAS, the Department operates the Commonwealth's three veterans cemeteries, which provide burial and perpetual care services to veterans and eligible dependents; and

WHEREAS, the Department operates the Commonwealth's two Veterans Care Centers with a combined 400-bed capacity for the provision of long-term physical, occupational, and speech therapy, as well as therapeutic recreation, social and spiritual activities, and other services such as an on-site pharmacy; and

WHEREAS, the Department executes the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program, which provides support to Virginia's veterans, members of the Virginia National Guard, Virginia residents in the Armed Forces Reserves, and their family members; and

WHEREAS, Virginia has the nation's seventh-largest veteran population and the nation's highest veteran population as a percentage of total state population, and this veteran population is expected to grow over the next four years; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission be directed to review the Department of Veterans Services.

In conducting its review, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall (i) examine the changing demographics of the newest generations of veterans (post-9/11) and consider what changes are needed to the services currently provided by the Department; (ii) assess ways the Department is able to reach Virginia veterans such that all new veterans have easy access to information and services; (iii) assess the number, roles, and allocation of staff; (iv) assess whether the needs of Virginia veterans are adequately addressed through the benefits claims process; (v) review the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program for any existing overlap of services provided by other state agencies and, in view of the unique care needs of veterans, determine whether or how such services can effectively be provided by other state agencies to reduce duplication and reduce the costs of providing such services; (vi) assess the delivery of services at state cemeteries to ensure services are consistent and determine if there are any possible efficiencies in consolidating daily or fiscal operations; (vii) assess the effectiveness of coordination with other agencies and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; (viii) examine whether the statutory definition of "veteran" affects whom the Department is able to serve; (ix) review the structures and approaches by which other states carry out veterans affairs functions; and (x) review any other issues and make recommendations as appropriate.

All agencies of the Commonwealth, including the Department of Veterans Services, Department of Medical Assistance Services, Department of Social Services, Department of Health, Department of Military Affairs, and Department of Human Resource Management, shall provide assistance to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission for this review, upon request. The Department of Veterans Services shall furnish information, including departmental records, to Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission staff as requested in accordance with §§ 30-59 and 30-69 of the Code of Virginia.

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission shall complete its meetings for the first year by

November 30, 2015, and for the second year by November 30, 2016, and the chairman shall submit to the Division of Legislative Automated Systems an executive summary of its findings and recommendations no later than the first day of the next Regular Session of the General Assembly for each year. Each executive summary shall state whether the Commission intends to submit to the General Assembly and the Governor a report of its findings and recommendations for publication as a House or Senate document. The executive summaries and reports shall be submitted as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents and reports and shall be posted on the General Assembly's website.