

No. 2007-66

AN ACT

SB 915

Amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, providing for the establishment of a grant program for designated accredited veterans' service organizations, for defraying the costs for wages, benefits, training and equipment and for improving outreach and delivery of services to Pennsylvania's veterans.

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania hereby enacts as follows:

Section-1. Title 51 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes is amended by adding a section to read:

§ 9304. Grants to veterans' service officer programs.

(a) Award allocations.—From funds specifically appropriated for this purpose, the department shall award grants to designated veterans' service organizations to support veterans' service officer programs. Grants awarded under this section shall be used solely to support accredited veterans' service officers and the associated costs, including:

- (1) Wages, benefits, other compensation and related personnel costs.*
- (2) Training provided by accredited veterans' service advocacy staff.*
- (3) Equipment to be used by accredited veterans' service officer staff.*

(b) Program goals.—The goals of the program shall include:

- (1) improvement of the coordination and distribution of veterans' benefits;*
- (2) maximization of the effective and efficient use of taxpayer dollars; and*
- (3) increasing veterans' participation in available benefits programs.*

(c) Use of grants.—A designated veterans' service organization shall use grants received under this section to improve the administration and delivery of services to Pennsylvania's veterans and meet the goals set forth in subsection (b) by:

- (1) Increasing interaction between the veterans' service organizations and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in order to enhance the delivery of services to Pennsylvania veterans.*
- (2) Increasing the number of initial claims filed with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs on behalf of Pennsylvania veterans for service-related disabilities or pension benefits.*
- (3) Developing methods to increase rates of recovery paid by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to Pennsylvania veterans.*
- (4) Expanding training opportunities for designated veterans' service organizations and veterans' service officers.*

(5) *Increasing either the number or percentage of Pennsylvania veterans enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs health care system.*

(6) *Improving coordination among the veterans' service organizations and with the department to assure an integrated approach to claims processing.*

(7) *Improving outreach services to veterans throughout Pennsylvania and each of its counties.*

(d) *Eligibility.—The following veterans' service organizations are designated to receive grants under this program:*

(1) *The American Legion.*

(2) *AMVETS.*

(3) *Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.*

(4) *Disabled American Veterans.*

(5) *The department may designate additional Pennsylvania veterans' service organizations to receive grants under the program when:*

(i) *The veterans' service organization is a member of the State Veterans' Commission as listed in section 1702(b) (relating to State Veterans' Commission).*

(ii) *The veterans' service organization serves as an active participant in the State Veterans' Commission abiding by the statutory rules and guidelines.*

(e) *Application for allocations.—Veterans' service organizations eligible for funding under subsection (c) shall submit an annual spending plan to the department in order to be eligible to receive a grant under this section consistent with the provisions of subsections (b) and (c).*

(f) *Amount of grants.—The department shall determine the annual allocation to each of the designated veterans' service organizations based on the spending plan submitted under subsection (e) for the upcoming fiscal year and on actual recoveries from the previous fiscal year. If the total appropriation totals less than the collective spending plans, the department shall prorate the allocations among eligible organizations based on the spending plan and past performance.*

(g) *Procedures, policies and guidelines.—The department shall establish procedures, policies, guidelines, forms and reporting requirements necessary to carry out the purposes of this program within 45 days of the effective date of this section. Procedures, policies, guidelines, forms and reporting requirements established under this section shall be submitted to the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives for their review and comment.*

(h) *Reporting requirements.—On or before October 1 of each year, designated veterans' service organizations participating in the program established by this section shall file a written report with the Adjutant*

General and the Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs and send copies to the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives and State Veterans' Commission. The report shall contain the following information:

(1) A description of all veterans' service officer activities, an accounting of recoveries and a listing of volunteer hours for the preceding Commonwealth fiscal year.

(2) A proposed budget and spending plan for the Commonwealth fiscal year beginning on July 1 of the year following the filing of the report.

(3) An accounting of its expenditures from grants awarded under this program, audited by a certified public accountant for the preceding Commonwealth fiscal year.

(i) Review of reports.—The Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives shall review the reports filed by the participating veterans' service organizations.

(j) Audits.—The department or the Auditor General may conduct such audits and reviews of the grant program hereby established as the department or the Auditor General determines to be necessary or appropriate. Copies of all audit reports or reviews conducted by the department or the Auditor General shall be made available to the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the Senate and the chairman and minority chairman of the Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the House of Representatives.

Section 2. This act shall apply to fiscal years beginning on and after July 1, 2007, when and if funds are specifically appropriated to support the grant program established by this act. The appropriation to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs for veterans outreach services in section 218 of the act of July 17, 2007 (P.L.499, No.8A), known as the General Appropriation Act of 2007, shall be disbursed consistently with the provisions of this act.

Section 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

APPROVED—The 12th day of December, A.D. 2007.

EDWARD G. RENDELL