

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY APRIL 11, 2011

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2011–12 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1209

Introduced by Assembly Member Cook Members Cook and Pan
(Principal coauthor: Senator Correa)

(Coauthors: Assembly Members Atkins, Bill Berryhill, Block, Buchanan, Donnelly, Fletcher, Garrick, Grove, Halderman, Jeffries, Knight, Logue, Ma, Morrell, Nestande, Nielsen, V. Manuel Pérez, Silva, Valadao, and Wagner)

(Coauthors: Senators Berryhill, Correa, Calderon, Harman, La Malfa, Lieu, and Rubio Rubio, and Runner)

February 18, 2011

An act to add Section 972.3 to the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1209, as amended, Cook. ~~County veterans service officers. Department of Veterans Affairs: veterans' services.~~

Existing law allows the board of supervisors of each county to appoint a county veterans service officer, whose duty is to administer the aid for veterans, as specified *establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is responsible for administering various programs and services for the benefit of veterans.*

This bill would appropriate the sum of ~~\$11,000,000~~ \$7,300,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for disbursement to the counties to fund the activities of the county veterans service officers to provide for specified veterans' services.

Vote: $\frac{2}{3}$. Appropriation: yes. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The Legislature finds and declares all of the
2 following:

3 (a) The current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are creating
4 an entirely new generation of veterans who may be eligible for
5 federal benefits because of their war service and their physical and
6 mental condition. Californians make up to 10 percent of the
7 military forces being used in these conflicts.

8 (b) The California National Guard, as well as reserve forces in
9 California, are providing significant force levels to these wars.

10 (c) Most of these returning California veterans are not aware of
11 the federal and state benefits that are available to them.

12 (d) Additionally, it is estimated that in California there may be
13 over two million veterans and their widows or widowers, who are
14 unaware that they may be eligible for pensions from the federal
15 government based upon their past military service in World War
16 II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, or the current conflicts in the
17 Middle East.

18 (e) In 1997, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed
19 Senate Bill 608, enacted as Chapter 318 of the Statutes of 1997,
20 that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.
21 Chapter 318 requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to
22 annually determine the amount of new or increased monetary
23 benefits paid to eligible veterans by the federal government that
24 were attributable to the assistance of county veterans service
25 officers and requires the Department of Finance to consider an
26 increase in the annual budget for county veterans service officers,
27 in an amount not to exceed five million dollars (\$5,000,000), if
28 justified.

29 (f) In 1997, through the efforts of county veterans service
30 officers, new or increased federal veterans' benefits had risen to
31 eighty-eight million dollars (\$88,000,000). From 1997 until 2006,
32 these new and increased federal veterans' benefits had risen to
33 over one hundred seventy-seven million dollars (\$177,000,000)
34 as a result of the State of California providing annual subvention
35 funding to county veterans service officers of up to two million
36 three hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$2,350,000).

37 (g) From 2007 until 2010, the annual subvention was increased
38 to two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000), and by

1 2010, the annual federal benefits attributable to county veterans
2 service officers had risen to three hundred five million dollars
3 (\$305,000,000).

4 (h) In 2009, the Legislature passed and the Governor signed
5 Senate Bill 419, enacted as Chapter 183 of the Statutes of 2009
6 that amended Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.
7 Chapter 318 found and declared that 50 percent of the amount
8 annually budgeted for county veterans service officers is
9 approximately eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000). The
10 Legislature further found and declared that it is an efficient and
11 reasonable use of state funds to increase the annual budget for
12 county veterans service officers in an amount not to exceed eleven
13 million dollars (\$11,000,000) if it is justified by the monetary
14 benefits to the state's veterans attributable to the effort of these
15 officers.

16 (i) County veterans service officers provide valuable services
17 to California's veterans and to the state and its counties by assisting
18 veterans in obtaining federal and state benefits to which the
19 veterans are entitled.

20 (j) County veterans service officers also contribute to increased
21 revenues and significant cost avoidance for the state and its
22 counties far in excess of the amount of state general funding
23 provided to them.

24 (k) Since 1995, at a cost to the state of thirty-three million
25 dollars (\$33,000,000) from the General Fund, the county veterans
26 service officers have obtained two billion nine hundred
27 seventy-eight million dollars (\$2,978,000,000) in federal veterans
28 benefits for California veterans and their dependents, thereby
29 garnering the state an 88-fold increase on its investment.

30 (l) In 2010, the Governor implemented, and the Legislature
31 approved, Operation Welcome Home, a statewide campaign to
32 connect with every returning veteran to determine his or her needs
33 and connect the returning veterans with the services to assist in
34 the successful transition from the battlefield to the homefront.

35 (m) Each year, since the current conflicts began, 30,000 military
36 men and women are discharged from military service in California
37 and it is beneficial and cost effective to the state to provide these
38 new veterans assistance in navigating the myriad of federal, state,
39 local, nonprofit, and private sector service provider benefits and
40 services for which they are eligible.

(n) The goal of Operation Welcome Home is to reduce veterans' homelessness, decrease veterans' unemployment rates, increase participation in federal veterans programs, such as federal unemployment benefits, compensation, and pension programs, increase the number of veterans in California colleges and universities, increase early detection of mental illness, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury, and divert veterans from the criminal justice system.

(o) The goals of Operation Welcome Home necessitate an increased utilization of the county veterans service officers, who are the interface between the state and counties with the veteran's community.

(p) As a result, the Governor's budget proposed to increase local assistance to Operation Welcome Home and the county veterans service officers from two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000) to eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000), the full amount allowed by Senate Bill 419.

(q) The Legislature approved an increase in local assistance from two million six hundred thousand dollars (\$2,600,000) to seven million six hundred thousand dollars (\$7,600,000) in recognition of the fact that county veterans service officers not only fulfilled the moral obligation of assisting our veterans but also that in the last 15 years, the county veterans service officers have brought three billion dollars (\$3,000,000,000) in new, unencumbered federal moneys into the state for a modest expenditure by the state of thirty-four million dollars (\$34,000,000) in local assistance.

SEC. 2. Section 972.3 is added to the Military and Veterans Code, to read:

~~972.3. Notwithstanding any other law, eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for disbursement to the counties in accordance with the existing procedures established under Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code.~~

972.3. Notwithstanding any other law, the sum of seven million three hundred thousand dollars (\$7,300,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide for veterans' services, in accordance with the following schedule:

- 1 (a) Two million four hundred thousand dollars (\$2,400,000)
2 for disbursement to the counties in accordance with the existing
3 procedures established under Section 972.1.
4 (b) Two million dollars (\$2,000,000) for disbursement to the
5 counties for grants for veterans' services.
6 (c) Two million three hundred thousand dollars (\$2,300,000)
7 for use in Operation Welcome Home or its successor program.
8 (d) Six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000) for grants to
9 nonprofit organizations such as veterans' service organizations
10 and community-based organizations.

O