

**Introduced by Senator Correa**

February 15, 2013

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

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 296, as introduced, Correa. County veterans service officers.

Existing law requires funds to be disbursed each fiscal year on a pro rata basis to counties that have established and maintained a county veterans service officer in accordance with the staffing level and workload of each county veterans service officer, under a specified formula.

This bill would appropriate the sum of \$5,000,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the disbursement to counties to fund the activities of county veterans service officers, as specified.

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 recent conflicts in the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan
- 4 are creating an entirely new generation of veterans who may be
- 5 eligible for federal veterans benefits because of their war service
- 6 and their physical and mental condition. California service

1 members make up to 10 percent of the military forces used in these  
2 conflicts.

3 (b) The California National Guard and California-based reserve  
4 units have contributed significantly to these current conflicts.

5 (c) Many of these returning California veterans are not aware  
6 of the federal and state benefits that are available to them.

7 (d) Additionally, it is estimated that in California there may be  
8 over two million veterans and their widows or widowers, who are  
9 unaware that they may be eligible for pensions from the federal  
10 government based upon their past military service in World War  
11 II, Korea, Vietnam, or the Gulf War.

12 (e) California's county veterans service officers (CVSO's) are  
13 the initial local point of contact for claimants accessing the United  
14 States Department of Veterans Affairs.

15 (f) The costs of maintaining CVSO's are shared from county  
16 general funds and state reimbursement to the counties. In 1997, in  
17 order to track performance, the Governor signed into law Senate  
18 Bill 608, which required the Department of Veterans Affairs to  
19 annually report the amount of monetary benefits paid to veterans  
20 by the federal government that were attributable to the assistance  
21 of CVSO's. Senate Bill 608 of the 1997-98 Regular Session  
22 requires the Department of Finance to consider an increase in the  
23 annual budget for CVSO's of up \$5,000,000, if approved in the  
24 yearly budget process. In 2009, the Governor signed Senate Bill  
25 419 into law, which raised this amount to \$11,000,000, if approved  
26 in the yearly budget process.

27 (g) As a result of this annual reporting, by the end of 2011 it  
28 had been determined that from 1995 to 2011, the state had  
29 cumulatively budgeted \$36.2 million for its share of the cost of  
30 the CVSO's. As a result of this investment, CVSO's were able to  
31 assist local veterans in obtaining \$3.3 billion in new federal  
32 moneys. This is a return of about \$91 for every dollar the state  
33 allocates to CVSO's. Furthermore, \$3.6 billion only reflects the  
34 actual monetary benefits qualified for in a given year. The monetary  
35 benefits qualified for in prior years are not tracked, yet the veterans  
36 and their dependents may continue to receive those benefits for  
37 the rest of their life. Added to this stellar return on the state's  
38 investment, but not counted in the annual reporting are the  
39 Medi-Cal cost avoidance savings incurred as a result of CVSO's

1 qualifying and shifting veterans away from Medi-Cal and onto the  
2 appropriate federal veterans program.

3 (h) CVSO's had accomplished all of this without ever reaching  
4 the allowable state budget allocation of \$5 million, set in 1997, or  
5 the updated allowable allocation set in 2009. To date, the CVSO's  
6 have not received more than \$2.6 million per year from the state.

7 (i) It is critical that the CVSO's receive an increase in this  
8 allocation because there continues to be a large number of  
9 underserved veterans and their dependents who are not aware of  
10 the federal benefits available to them as a result of their military  
11 service. Studies from other states have shown that increases in  
12 CVSO's have resulted in larger amounts of federal moneys to the  
13 veterans. These new federal moneys and benefits are paid directly  
14 from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to the  
15 qualifying veteran or their dependent and are used in the local  
16 economy.

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

19 972.3. Notwithstanding any other law, the sum of five million  
20 dollars (\$5,000,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund  
21 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the disbursement to  
22 counties in accordance with the existing procedures established  
23 under Section 972.1.