

AMENDED IN ASSEMBLY MARCH 26, 2015

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE—2015–16 REGULAR SESSION

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 75

Introduced by Assembly Member Mathis

January 5, 2015

An act to amend Section 981.5 of the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 75, as amended, Mathis. Veterans.

Existing law, the Budget Act of 2014, appropriates \$3,000,000 to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of assisting the United States Department of Veterans Affairs in processing veterans' claims.

This bill would extend the authorization to encumber or expend that \$3,000,000 until June 30, 2020. By extending the Department of Veterans Affairs' authority to expend funds, the bill would make an appropriation.

~~Existing law authorizes the California Veterans' Educational Institute, which is under the management and control of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to provide opportunities for veterans to continue their education. Existing law authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with authorized agencies of the United States in providing those opportunities.~~

~~This bill would make technical, nonsubstantive changes to this provision.~~

Vote: ~~majority~~^{2/3}. Appropriation: ~~no~~ yes. Fiscal committee: ~~no~~ 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:*

2 *(a) The Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) works to serve*
3 *California veterans and their families. With nearly two million*
4 *veterans living in the state, CalVet strives to ensure that its veterans*
5 *of every era and their families receive the state and federal benefits*
6 *and services they have earned and deserve as a result of their*
7 *selfless and honorable military service. CalVet strives to serve*
8 *veterans and their families with dignity and compassion and to*
9 *help them achieve their highest quality of life.*

10 *(b) In 2013, Governor Jerry Brown introduced a budget that*
11 *authorized \$3 million and 36 limited-term positions that allowed*
12 *CalVet to coordinate with the United States Department of*
13 *Veterans Affairs (VA) to assist in reducing its massive veterans'*
14 *claims backlog.*

15 *(c) The funds appropriated were used to hire a "Strike Force"*
16 *team of 12 Veterans Claims Representatives (VCR) for each of the*
17 *VA's regional offices in the Cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, and*
18 *San Diego to focus on backlogged claims, ensuring they are*
19 *properly developed and have all necessary documentation needed*
20 *for adjudication.*

21 *(d) At the time the CalVet Strike Teams were initially deployed*
22 *in the Fall of 2013, the national average wait time for benefits*
23 *from the federal government was 349.6 days. This meant the*
24 *average veteran waited nearly a year before receiving benefits*
25 *that are considered a right. The average wait times in the Cities*
26 *of Los Angeles and Oakland were significantly worse than the*
27 *national average, at 619.4 days and 617.8 days, respectively.*

28 *(e) As of January 29, 2015, CalVet Strike Team claims review*
29 *efforts in the Cities of Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego have*
30 *reviewed 44,921 claims, resulting in lump sum payments to*
31 *California veterans totaling \$45,603,451, monthly award payments*
32 *totaling \$5,878,940, and an annual monthly awards payment total*
33 *of \$70,547,276 going to California veterans every year for the rest*
34 *of their lives.*

35 *(f) While the Strike Teams have done remarkable work, the*
36 *mission is still not complete as the VA is still not on pace to fully*
37 *eliminate their claims backlog by the end of next year, a goal long*
38 *promised by department officials.*

1 (g) *California veterans have served their country and their*
2 *communities with honor and distinction, and deserve the benefits*
3 *that have been promised to them.*

4 SEC. 2. *Three million dollars (\$3,000,000) of the amount*
5 *appropriated in Item 8955-001-0001 of Section 2.0 of the Budget*
6 *Act of 2014 (Chapter 25 of the Statutes of 2014), as referenced in*
7 *Provision 5 of that item, shall be available for encumbrance or*
8 *expenditure until June 30, 2020, after which it shall revert to the*
9 *General Fund.*

10 ~~SECTION 1. Section 981.5 of the Military and Veterans Code~~
11 ~~is amended to read:~~

12 ~~981.5. The department may cooperate and confer with~~
13 ~~authorized agencies of the United States in implementing this~~
14 ~~article.~~