

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 557

**Introduced by Assembly Members John A. Pérez, Cook, and Pan
(Principal coauthor: Assembly Member Blumenfield)**

February 16, 2011

An act to add Article 8.3 (commencing with Section 999.90) to Chapter 6 of Division 4 of the Military and Veterans Code, relating to military and veterans.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 557, as introduced, John A. Pérez. Veterans: National Guard: California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Programs.

Existing law provides certain protections and benefits for veterans and members of the National Guard.

This bill would create in state government the California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Programs, composed of specified members, for the purpose of bringing together key state agencies and departments, federal officials, legislative representatives, local governments, and stakeholder organizations to ensure that the state's programs that serve veterans are efficiently administered and properly integrated with federal and local government and other stakeholder organizations.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: no.

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

SECTION 1. Article 8.3 (commencing with Section 999.90) is added to Chapter 6 of Division 4 of the Military and Veterans Code, to read:

Article 8.3. California Interagency Council on Veteran Services
and Programs

999.90. The Legislature hereby finds and declares all of the following:

(a) The care of veterans and our National Guard members and their families cannot be neglected, especially while the country remains at war.

(b) The needs of California's over two million veterans and their families are diverse and the challenges they face are many. The issues, including, but not limited to, supportive housing, homelessness, mental health, and job training, affect veterans from the World War II and Vietnam eras to younger veterans returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

(c) While the federal government has a primary role in providing for the care of our veterans, the programs and services offered by the federal government do not address the needs of many of our veterans in a comprehensive manner, and consequently the gaps in service are increasingly defaulting to state and local providers.

(d) A 2009 audit performed by the Bureau of State Audits found that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides few direct services to veterans, outside of its operation of the Veterans' Homes of California and the CalVet Farm and Home Loan program, and that the department has extremely limited interaction and few formal agreements with other state agencies and departments that could provide additional services to veterans if done in a coordinated and efficient manner.

(e) The 2009 audit additionally noted that the Department of Veterans Affairs strategic plan covering the 2007–08 to 2011–12 fiscal years, inclusive, was incomplete and has not formally assessed veterans' needs, has not included key stakeholders in its strategic planning process, and has not effectively measured its progress towards meeting the goals and objectives identified in the plan.

(f) The 2009 audit additionally confirmed that California's veterans participate in collecting federal disability and pension benefits at rates that are significantly lower than those in other states with large veteran populations. These disability payments are paid directly to the veterans and generate a significant contribution to California's economy.

(g) The California Research Bureau recently estimated that there are approximately 29,000 homeless veterans currently in California, and it has been reported that veterans make up over 20 percent of the homeless population. It has also been reported that Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans, and increasingly women veterans, are becoming homeless sooner than veterans from the Vietnam era. Unfortunately, the CalVet Farm and Home Loan program only provides benefits to veterans who want to purchase single-family homes, which does not serve the growing needs of our homeless veteran community and their families, who are increasingly in need of emergency shelter and transitional, multifamily, and supportive housing programs.

999.91. For purposes of this article:

(a) "Council" means the California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Programs.

(b) "Stakeholder organization" means a nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to serve veterans or members of the National Guard, or both.

999.92. There is hereby created in state government the California Interagency Council on Veteran Services and Programs.

999.93. (a) The council shall consist of all of the following members:

(1) The secretary or director, as applicable, or his or her designee with decision making authority, from each of the following:

- (A) Service and volunteering.
- (B) The Department of Housing and Community Development.
- (C) The Employment Development Department.
- (D) The Department of Veterans Affairs.
- (E) The State Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs.
- (F) The State Department of Health Care Services.
- (G) The Employment Training Panel.
- (H) The State Department of Mental Health.
- (I) The Military Department.
- (J) The Department of General Services.

1 (K) The California Workforce Investment Board.

2 (2) A representative of the Governor's office.

3 (3) Two representatives of county government selected by the
4 Governor who are county veteran services officers.

5 (4) The Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Veterans
6 Affairs or a representative appointed by the Senate Committee on
7 Rules.

8 (5) The Chairperson of the Assembly Committee on Veterans
9 Affairs or a representative appointed by the Speaker of the
10 Assembly.

11 (6) Representatives of two stakeholder organizations, with one
12 to be appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly and the other to
13 be appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules.

14 (b) The Governor shall appoint a chairperson and vice
15 chairperson from among the members of the council.

16 (c) Members of the council shall not receive any compensation.

17 999.94. The purpose of the council is to bring together key
18 state agencies and departments, federal officials, legislative
19 representatives, local governments, and stakeholder organizations
20 to ensure that the state's programs that serve veterans are efficiently
21 administered and properly integrated with federal and local
22 government and other stakeholder organizations.

23 999.95. The council may establish working groups, task forces,
24 or other structures from within its membership or with outside
25 members to assist it in its work. Working groups, task forces, or
26 other structures established by the council shall determine their
27 own meeting schedules.

28 999.96. The council shall do all of the following:

29 (a) In its first year of operation, hold public meetings at least
30 once every month. In its second year of operation, and each
31 subsequent year thereafter, hold public meetings at least once every
32 quarter.

33 (b) Invite appropriate representatives of the federal government,
34 including, but not limited to, representatives of the United States
35 Department of Veterans Affairs, the United States Department of
36 Housing and Urban Development, and the United States
37 Department of Labor to participate in the council.

38 (c) Ensure that state agencies and departments are doing all of
39 the following:

1 (1) Adequately serving the needs of veterans and National Guard
2 members and continuously evaluating whether their programs are
3 accommodating the surge in demand for services from veterans
4 returning from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring
5 Freedom.

6 (2) Coordinating with federal agencies and departments,
7 including, but not limited to, the United States Department of
8 Veterans Affairs, the United States Department of Housing and
9 Urban Development, and the United States Department of Labor
10 to determine whether California is maximizing the use of federal
11 funding available to support veterans programs.

12 (3) Discussing with local governments, the private sector, and
13 stakeholder organizations ways to complement or utilize existing
14 services provided by state and federal veterans programs and
15 potential mechanisms for streamlining the administration of
16 veterans programs across agencies and jurisdictions to reduce
17 duplication, consolidate availability of services, and ease veterans
18 access to services.

19 (4) Soliciting input and suggestions from stakeholder
20 organizations, the business community, the concerned public, and
21 other governmental agencies on the most effective strategies to
22 serve veterans.

23 (5) Identifying best practices from other states in serving
24 veterans.

25 (6) Creating a plan for council actions by the end of the first
26 year after the initial meeting to implement recommendations for
27 policy, regulatory, and resource changes needed to accomplish
28 objectives, as well as each agency's and department's
29 responsibilities on the council.

30 999.97. The council may engage or accept the services of
31 agency or department personnel, accept the services of stakeholder
32 organizations, and accept private or other nonstate funding to
33 operate, manage, or conduct the business of the council.

34 999.98. The council shall operate within the current budget of
35 each department and agency represented. Each department and
36 agency shall cooperate with the council and furnish it with
37 information and assistance that is necessary or useful to further
38 the purposes of this article.

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