

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1596

Introduced by Assembly Member Mathis

January 7, 2016

An act to amend Section 699.5 of the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans, and making an appropriation therefor.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1596, as introduced, Mathis. Veteran service organizations.

Existing law authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to assist a veteran and his or her dependents or survivors to make a claim against the United States arising out of military service and establishing a right to a privilege, preference, care, or compensation. Existing law authorizes the department to cooperate and, with approval of the Department of Finance, contract with any veterans service organization for the purpose of assisting veterans in their claims. Existing law defines veterans service organization for these purposes.

This bill would continuously appropriate \$1,000,000 from the General Fund each fiscal year to the Department of Veterans Affairs for the purpose of grants to veterans service organizations. The bill would additionally require a veteran service organization to have a presence in this state and be registered with both the Secretary of State and Attorney General.

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. Section 699.5 of the Military and Veterans Code
2 is amended to read:

3 699.5. (a) (1) The department may assist every veteran of
4 the United States and the dependent or survivor of every veteran
5 of the United States in presenting and pursuing the claim as the
6 veteran, dependent, or survivor may have against the United States
7 arising out of military service and in establishing the veteran's,
8 dependent's, or survivor's right to any privilege, preference, care,
9 or compensation provided for by the laws of the United States or
10 of this state. The department may cooperate and, with the approval
11 of the Department of Finance, contract with any veterans service
12 organization, and pursuant to the contract may compensate the
13 organization for services within the scope of this section rendered
14 by it to any veteran or dependent or survivor of a veteran. The
15 contract shall not be made unless the department determines that,
16 owing to the confidential relationships involved and the necessity
17 of operating through agencies that the veterans, dependents, or
18 survivors involved will feel to be sympathetic toward their
19 problems, the services cannot satisfactorily be rendered otherwise
20 than through the agency of the veterans organization and that the
21 best interests of the veterans, dependents, or survivors involved
22 will be served if the contract is made.

23 (2) *Notwithstanding Section 13340 of the Government Code,*
24 *the sum of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) is hereby continuously*
25 *appropriated, without regard to fiscal years, from the General*
26 *Fund each fiscal year to the department, for the purpose of grants*
27 *and contracts pursuant to paragraph (1).*

28 (b) (1) The Legislature finds and declares that services provided
29 by veterans service organizations play an important role in the
30 department's responsibilities to assist veterans and their dependents
31 and survivors in presenting and pursuing claims against the United
32 States, and that it is an efficient and reasonable use of state funds
33 to provide compensation to veterans service organizations for these
34 services.

35 (2) The Legislature further finds and declares that paragraph
36 (1) shall not be implemented by using the General Fund until the
37 annual budget for county veterans service officers reaches a
38 minimum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000). This subdivision

1 shall not be construed to preclude the use of federal funding in
2 implementing these provisions.

3 (c) Veterans service organizations that elect to contract with the
4 department in accordance with this section shall document the
5 claims processed each year by the veterans service officers
6 employed by the veterans service organization at offices located
7 in California. The documentation shall be in accordance with
8 procedures established by the department.

9 (d) The department shall determine annually the amount of
10 monetary benefits paid to eligible veterans and their dependents
11 and survivors in the state as a result of the work of the veterans
12 service officers of the contracting organizations. Beginning on
13 January 1, 2006, the department shall, on or before January 1 of
14 each year, prepare and transmit its determination for the preceding
15 fiscal year to the Department of Finance and the Legislature. The
16 department shall also identify federal sources to support the efforts
17 of veterans service organizations pursuant to this section. The
18 Department of Finance shall review the department's determination
19 in time to use the information in the annual Budget Act for the
20 budget of the department for the next fiscal year.

21 (e) For purposes of this section:

22 (1) "Survivor" means any relation of a deceased veteran who
23 may be entitled to make a claim for any privilege, preference, care,
24 or compensation under the laws of the United States or this state
25 based upon the veteran's war service.

26 (2) "Veterans service officer" means an individual employed
27 by a veterans service organization and accredited by the United
28 States Department of Veterans Affairs to process and adjudicate
29 claims and other benefits for veterans and their dependents and
30 survivors.

31 (3) "Veterans service organization" means an organization that
32 meets all of the following criteria:

33 (A) Is formed by and for United States military veterans.

34 (B) Is chartered by the United States Congress.

35 (C) Has regularly maintained an established committee or
36 agency in a regional office of the United States Department of
37 Veterans Affairs in California rendering services to veterans and
38 their dependents and ~~survivors~~. *survivors for at least the past five*
39 *years.*

- 1 *(D) Has an active statewide California organization with a*
- 2 *presence in the state and is registered with the Secretary of State*
- 3 *and the Attorney General.*

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