



INTERIM REPORT

to the 87th Texas Legislature

A black and white photograph of the Texas State Capitol building, showing its iconic dome and the statue of Liberty on top. The building is partially obscured by trees in the foreground.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
DEFENSE & VETERANS' AFFAIRS



DECEMBER 2020

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON DEFENSE AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS
TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
INTERIM REPORT 2020**

**A REPORT TO THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
87TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE**

**DAN FLYNN
CHAIRMAN**

**COMMITTEE CLERK
AMY RISTER**



Committee On
Defense and Veterans' Affairs

December 18, 2020

Dan Flynn
Chairman

P.O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768-2910

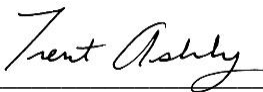
The Honorable Dennis Bonnen
Speaker, Texas House of Representatives
Members of the Texas House of Representatives
Texas State Capitol, Rm. 2W.13
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mr. Speaker and Fellow Members:


The Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs of the Eighty-sixth Legislature hereby submits its interim report including recommendations and drafted legislation for consideration by the Eighty-seventh Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,


Dan Flynn


Trent Ashby


Trent Ashby


Ray Lopez

Ray Lopez


Ana-Maria Ramos

Ramon Romero Jr.


Gina Hinojosa


J.M. Lozano

Ron Reynolds


Tony Tinderholt

Tony Tinderholt
Vice-Chairman

Members: Representative Trent Ashby, Representative Gina Hinojosa, Representative Ray Lopez, Representative J.M. Lozano, Representative Ana-Maria Ramos, Representative Ron Reynolds, and Representative Ramon Romero Jr.

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Interim Charges

Charge 1.

Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- HB 1326, which is the sunset legislation for the Texas Military Department. Examine the Adjutant General's policy outlining the director of state administration's responsibility for state administrative interests across all programs, including evaluating procedures for oversight of state employees and mitigating compliance risks.

Charge 2.

Study the mental health treatment options available for all Texas veterans, including efforts to fill gaps left by federal government. Make recommendations for future legislation streamlining mental health treatment coordination among federal, state, and local agencies.

Charge 3.

Study the potential impact of eliminating Regional Military Sustainability Commissions as an ineffective tool in assisting Texas military installations and their host defense communities with protecting the missions, operations, readiness, and resiliency of military installations. Identify new and enhanced strategies to replace the Commissions with land use limitations or restrictions, regulatory strategies, annexation powers, contractual agreements, or other tools to preserve military use areas inside and outside municipal boundaries.

Charge 4.

Examine gaps in services and assess efforts to connect justice-involved veterans, senior citizens, and homeless populations to services while incarcerated and after release at both the local and state levels. Specifically, the committee should evaluate training and technical assistance provided by the Texas Veterans Commission to criminal justice agencies. (Joint charge with the House Committee on Corrections)

Charge 5.

Review the connection between the economic vitality of business and industry and the economic vitality of our military veterans transitioning into the workforce. Specifically, the committee should analyze barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the effectiveness of government transition and training benefits, and current and ongoing demand for veteran and military spouse employment from industry in Texas. (Joint charge with the House Committee on International Relations & Economic Development)

Charge 6.

Monitor the State Auditor's review of agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction. The Chair shall seek input and periodic briefings on completed audits for the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years and bring forth pertinent issues for full committee consideration.

Introduction

The Texas House Rules for the 86th Legislature state that the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs is made up of nine members, with jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to: the relations between the State of Texas and the federal government involving defense, emergency preparedness, and veterans issues, the various branches of the military service of the United States, the realignment or closure of military bases, the defense of the state and nation, including terrorism response, emergency preparedness, veterans of military and related services; and, the following state agencies: the Texas Military Department, the Texas Veterans Commission, the Veterans' Land Board, the Texas Military Preparedness Commission, the Texas Division of Emergency Management, and the Emergency Management Council.

At the beginning of the 86th Legislative Session, Speaker Dennis Bonnen appointed Chair Dan Flynn, Vice-Chair Tony Tinderholt, Representative Trent Ashby, Representative Gina Hinojosa, Representative Ray Lopez, Representative J.M. Lozano, Representative Ana-Maria Ramos, Representative Ron Reynolds, and Representative Ramon Romero Jr. to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs.

During the 86th regular legislative session, 64 House Bills and 19 Senate Bills were referred to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs. 12 Public Hearings were conducted to consider the legislation. The committee then favorably voted to send 25 bills to the Calendars Committee and 40 bills to the Local & Consent Calendars Committee for consideration by the full House of Representatives. 43 of those bills were passed by the House and 31 were passed by the Senate, signed by the Governor and are now effective as state law.

Over the interim, the committee was unable to hold public hearings due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead posted for written testimony to be submitted to the committee.

Charge 1.

Monitor the agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction and oversee the implementation of relevant legislation passed by the 86th Legislature. Conduct active oversight of all associated rulemaking and other governmental actions taken to ensure intended legislative outcome of all legislation, including the following:

- HB 1326, which is the sunset legislation for the Texas Military Department. Examine the Adjutant General's policy outlining the director of state administration's responsibility for state administrative interests across all programs, including evaluating procedures for oversight of state employees and mitigating compliance risks.

Senate Bill 601 Summary

As the state's main advocate for veterans, staff at the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) care deeply for the well-being of veterans and work diligently to fulfill the agency's many legislative mandates. The Sunset Commission focused on pushing the agency out of a business-as-usual mentality and toward continuous improvement. Senate Bill 601 requires TVC to set clear goals and performance targets, collect the right information to accurately measure impact to veterans, and better plan for future veteran needs across all its programs. Senate Bill 601 includes requirements for TVC to strategically manage the placement and targeting of its claims staff and measure how well its staff performs to achieve favorable VA decisions for veterans. The following material summarizes results of the Sunset review of TVC, including management actions directed to the agency that do not require legislative action.

Issue 1 — Planning and Improvement

- Recommendation 1.1, Adopted — Require TVC to annually evaluate and set priorities for all programs.
- Recommendation 1.2, Adopted — Require TVC to create and track meaningful outcome measures for all programs.
- Recommendation 1.3, Adopted — Direct TVC to survey Texas veterans on a regular basis about their experience with agency programs and overall needs. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 1.4, Adopted — Direct TVC to create a complaint process, make the complaint process accessible to the public, and track complaint data. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 2 — Benefit Claims

- Recommendation 2.1, Adopted — Require TVC to track, evaluate, and strategically adjust claims staffing and special teams.
- Recommendation 2.2, Adopted — Require TVC to better track and analyze claims outcome data to guide program success.
- Recommendation 2.3, Adopted — Remove specific statutory military service requirements for veteran county service officers (VCSOs), but add a statutory requirement for a veterans preference for VCSOs based on the veterans preference in state law that state agencies follow (Section 657.002, Texas Government Code). Also, require counties to adopt their own veterans preference policies for VCSOs.
- Recommendation 2.4, Adopted — Direct TVC to temporarily report on claims staffing and outcome data analyses. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 2.5, Adopted — Direct TVC to strengthen support for claims staff and preserve institutional knowledge. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 2.6, Adopted — Direct TVC to add information to its website about the claims process, including forms, checklists, basic claims information, and embedded VA resources. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 2.7, Modified — Direct TVC to allow veterans to schedule appointments for claims counseling, while maintaining the option for walk-in services.

Also, direct the agency to use teleconference or other alternative technologies to assist Texas veterans when the veteran does not need to be physically present in the office for assistance. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 3 — Grants

- Recommendation 3.1, Adopted — Direct TVC to extend the length of its grant cycle from one to two years. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 3.2, Adopted — Direct the agency to formalize the roles and training of the commission and the grants advisory committee to improve quality and transparency in the evaluation process. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 3.3, Adopted — Direct TVC to develop and track enhanced grantee performance measures to better evaluate the benefit of its grant funding to veterans. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 4 — Training

- Recommendation 4.1, Adopted — Direct TVC to restructure and streamline the scope and expense of its annual conference. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 4.2, Adopted — Direct TVC to track and analyze detailed training costs to identify potential savings and improvements. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 4.3, Adopted — Direct TVC to prioritize online training and other cost-effective tools to facilitate regular collaboration among staff and partners. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 5 — Continue

- Recommendation 5.1, Adopted — Continue the Texas Veterans Commission for 12 years.
- Recommendation 5.2, Modified — Update the standard across-the-board requirement related to commission member training, including a requirement for each board member to attest to both receiving and reviewing the training manual annually.
- Recommendation 5.3, Adopted — The commission should implement requirements for encouraging purchasing from historically underutilized businesses. (Management action – nonstatutory)

New Recommendation Added by the Sunset Commission

Grant writing training for VCSOs, Adopted — Direct the agency to create and provide grant-writing training for veterans county service officers either through online or in-person training. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Provision Added by the Legislature

Mental Health Program director — Require TVC’s Mental Health Program director to be a licensed mental health professional and meet specific education and experience requirements. These requirements go into effect September 1, 2021. Fiscal Implication Summary Overall, the Sunset Commission’s recommendations on TVC, as enacted in Senate Bill 601, will not have a fiscal impact to the state and can be achieved with existing agency resources. Many provisions in the bill are designed to improve internal operations and efficiency at the agency, but their exact impact will depend on implementation.

Texas Veterans Commission Implementation of Sunset Changes, SB 601

Texas Veterans Commission was established in 1927 to advocate for and provide superior service to veterans that will significantly improve the quality of life for all Texas veterans, their families, and survivors. TVC has 8 main programs:

- **Claims Representation and Counseling** serves veterans, their dependents and survivors, in all matters pertaining to veterans’ disability benefits and rights. It is the designated agency of the state of Texas to represent the State and its veterans before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).
- **The Veterans Education Program** approves all programs for Chapter 30, 33, 35, 1606, and 1607 federal educational benefits. Through an approval process, the Texas Veterans Commission ensures that institutions and employers are in compliance with federal guidelines and are qualified to provide the type of training offered.
- **Veterans Employment Services** offers employment services to Texas veterans and helps employers find qualified veteran job applicants. The goal of these services is to match veteran job seekers with the best employment opportunities available.
- **The Veteran Entrepreneur Program (VEP)** which works to foster and promote veteran entrepreneurship throughout the state of Texas. The Texas Veterans Commission, with the help of the Governor’s office and several prominent Legislators, passed Senate Bill 1476 in 2013. This allowed for the funding of a team of experienced business consultants to be available for any veteran in the state of Texas to consult with, free of charge to the veteran.
- **The Fund for Veterans’ Assistance** is a program that makes grants to eligible charitable organizations, local government agencies, and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) that provide direct services to Texas veterans and their families.
- **The Health Care Advocacy Program** is a team of highly-trained Texas Veteran Commission staff, strategically positioned across the state to act as liaisons for Texas veterans in addressing issues involving Veterans Administration health care related services.
- In collaboration with the Department of State Health Services, the Texas Veterans Commission’s **Veterans Mental Health Program** consists of multiple initiatives focusing on peer support, clinical mental health care access, and community collaboration.
- **The Women Veterans Program** serves women veterans by helping them to obtain their benefits and services. We strive to raise awareness of women veteran contributions and

services to our country and state, as well as inform and educate women veterans and their resource providers about the benefits and services to women veterans.

**Sunset Advisory Commission Recommendations
Texas Veterans Commission**

Implementation Status of Sunset Advisory Commission Management Actions				
Texas Veterans Commission				
Issue Number	Management Action	Implementation Status	Implementation Date Or Expected Implementation Date	Comments
1.3	Direct TVC to survey Texas veterans on a regular basis about their experience with agency programs and overall needs.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	TVC Communications Department coordinates with all Programs to ensure that all surveys are created, distributed, and tracked in a uniformed process. The new and improved uniformed survey is live, data from these surveys is available for management analyze and improve overall service and efficiency of TVC services. The survey is available on the TVC website and distributed to veterans when they are provided services from TVC Staff.
1.4	Direct TVC to create a complaint process, make the complaint process accessible to the public, and track complaint data.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	TVC Complaint process is in place and is available on the TVC website. Complaints are tracked and recorded from the receipt of the complaint until its resolution. Data from the complaints is used to improve the quality of service to the public.
2.4	Direct TVC to temporarily report on claims staffing and outcome data analyses.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	The first report on staffing outcome and data analysis was completed in 2019 and is on the TVC's website. Data is being collected for the next report, which is due in January 2021.
2.5	Direct TVC to strengthen support for claims staff and preserve institutional knowledge.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	A detailed Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document for the program is in place. A succession plan was developed which includes the duties and responsibilities of each management position as well as a record of the training for each of the identified positions and their designated successors as well as Strike Force staff duties and responsibilities.
2.6	Direct TVC to add information to its website about the claims process, including forms, checklists, basic claims information, and embedded VA resources.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	The TVC website now has a claims checklist as well as required forms and information regarding each step of the disability claims process. Detailed information on the overall claim's submission process as well as links to the VA website are on the claims section of the TVC Website.

Issue Number	Management Action	Implementation Status	Implementation Date Or Expected Implementation Date	Comments
2.7	Direct TVC to allow veterans to schedule appointments for claims counseling, while maintaining the option for walk-in services. Also, direct the agency to use teleconference or other alternative technologies to assist Texas veterans when the veteran does not need to be physically present in the office for assistance.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	Appointments have been integrated into the Claims Program. Data regarding the amount of appointments made by veterans as well as the number of no-shows is being captured quarterly for analysis. Tele-appointments are currently being done as part of TVC's remote service due to COVID -19 restrictions. Microsoft Bookings software has been added as a tool to allow Veterans to make appointments online through the TVC website.
3.1	Direct TVC to extend the length of its grant cycle from one to two years.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	The TVC Fund for Veterans Assistance has initiated an additional one year extension opportunity for grantees that wish to have a two-year grant as long as they meet 3rd QTR performance and expenditure Benchmarks (per TAC \$460.2) and have no unresolved program compliance issues identified during the first 3 quarters.
3.2	Direct the agency to formalize the roles and training of the commission and the grants advisory committee to improve quality and transparency in the evaluation process.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	Training for the Staff and Advisory Committee was conducted on October 30, 2019 and January 29, 2020 the training was conducted in an open meeting and was posted on the Texas Register. Training materials and participation rosters have been documented and archived. Additional Training is planned for October 2020. Training for the Commissioners was conducted in November 2019.
3.3	Direct TVC to develop and track enhanced grantee performance measures to better evaluate the benefit of its grant funding to veterans.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	Performance measures are currently in place and evaluated by FVA compliance officers to ensure that grantees are meeting the requirements of the grant delivery. New internal performance measures are being implemented to ensure that Veterans are receiving quality service from the grantees. The data collected from the new internal performance measures will be used to create new key measures for consideration by the Commission for the next biennium.

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Issue Number	Management Action	Implementation Status	Implementation Date Or Expected Implementation Date	Comments
4.1	Direct TVC to restructure and streamline the scope and expense of its annual conference.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	A restructure of the Annual Conference was initiated in 2018 to smaller regional training. An analysis is being conducted to further streamline the process for effectiveness and cost savings for future training events. Due to COVID 19 all training is being conducted online.
4.2	Direct TVC to track and analyze detailed training costs to identify potential savings and improvements	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	The Training and Events Manager has worked with the TVC Finance Team to analyze training costs for additional savings and cost effectiveness. Claims Fall Training costs were analyzed, all travel and training costs have been paid with a total cost of \$73,090.76. This is a significant reduction in cost to the prior year's training. With the increased usage of online training content, there should be a significant downward trend in training cost in FY2021 Training. All training costs are now tracked and analyzed for additional cost savings and improvements
4.3	Direct TVC to prioritize online training and other cost-effective tools to facilitate regular collaboration among staff and partners.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	Online training has been implemented Agency-wide through a Learning Management System. An analysis of the usage and effectiveness is being conducted to further improve the content and increase the usage of online training. COVID 19 has temporarily made all training online, this will further enhance the capabilities and efficiency of TVC online training.
5.3	The commission should implement requirements for encouraging purchasing from historically underutilized businesses.	Fully Implemented	1 Jan 2019	Hub Policy and Mentor Policy and Subcontractor Policy are in place on TVC's website. The TVC Website makes available to the public the Agency's hub utilization rate as well as TVC's Commitment to utilize HUB's whenever possible.
New Recommendation	Direct the agency to create and provide grant-writing training for veterans county service officers either through online or in-person training.	Fully Implemented	1 Nov 2019	FVA has offered training to VCSO's for the grant application process. To date, 3 webinars have been attended by over 25 county VCSO's. In addition, FVA staff attends CJCC conferences, and have distributed over 50 training packets to County Leaders to encourage VCSO grant applications.

Implementation Status and definitions:

- Fully Implemented: Successful development and use of a process, system, or policy to implement a management action.
- Substantially Implemented: Successful development but inconsistent use of a process, system, or policy to implement a management action.
- Incomplete/Ongoing: Ongoing development of a process, system, or policy to address a management action.
- Not Implemented: Lack of a formal process, system, or policy to address a management action.

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**Implementation Chart
Texas Veterans Commission**

[S.B. 601 by Hall \(Flynn\)](#)

[Staff Report with Final Results](#)

Bill Reference	Recommendation Number	Bill Provision	Implementation Status
Page 1, Line 9	5.1	Continue TVC for 12 years.	No Action Necessary
Page 1, Line 15 to Page 2, Line 13; Page 9, Lines 14-27	5.2	Update standard across-the-board requirement related to commission member training, including a requirement for commission members to attest to receiving and reviewing the training manual annually.	The General Counsel developed training for each TVC Commissioner, which was completed before 1 December 2019. The General Counsel has created an acknowledgement form for Commissioners to attest that they have received the required training as well as in receipt of the training manual. All Commissioners are currently in compliance with this requirement, the General Counsel is responsible for maintaining the documentation of the training on file.
Page 4, Lines 9-13 and 21-27; Page 5, Lines 1-2; Page 7, Lines 18-20; Page 10, Lines 1-5	1.1	Require TVC to annually evaluate and set priorities for all programs.	Every TVC Program has completed an Operation Plan, which evaluates program staff, location, budget, and goals. Priorities for the programs are set based on the Operational Plan. Changes in program requirements that occur after the Operation Plan is complete can result in changes to the Operational Plan before the next planned review.

**Implementation Chart
Texas Veterans Commission**

[S.B. 601 by Hall \(Flynn\)](#)

[Staff Report with Final Results](#)

Bill Reference	Recommendation Number	Bill Provision	Implementation Status
Page 4, Lines 14-20; Page 10, Lines 6-18	1.2	Require TVC to create and track meaningful outcome measures for all programs.	All TVC Programs have completed proposed new key and non-key measures for that will emphasize outcomes instead of outputs which have been approved by Executive Management and presented to the Commission for approval. Approval to establish the new measures was granted by the Commission on 02/11/2020. LBB has approved new performance measures that measure both qualitative and quantitative measures. Key and non-key measures that were not approved for this cycle, will be kept internally for data tracking and performance review. Quarterly Reports are reported to the Commission on both key and non-key measures. Both quarterly and year to date data on measures and targets are also reported to the Commission. Data collected from the quarterly reports are considered when creating and updating the Operational Plan, this is an ongoing process and is updated as necessary.
Page 6, Lines 10-23	2.1	Require TVC to track, evaluate, and strategically adjust claims staffing and special teams.	Complete Annual reviews are conducted and reported on the Claims Program Operation Plan. Staffing levels as well as Staff location are analyzed and adjustments to staff levels and locations are made based on this review. This is a formal process that documents the requirements for an ongoing evaluation of the Claims program. This will be part of an ongoing annual review and changes will be made as needed based on data received from the Claims operating plan.

**Implementation Chart
Texas Veterans Commission**

[S.B. 601 by Hall \(Flynn\)](#)

[Staff Report with Final Results](#)

Bill Reference	Recommendation Number	Bill Provision	Implementation Status
Page 6, Line 24 to Page 7, Lines 21	2.2	Require TVC to better track and analyze claims outcome data to guide program success.	Complete Proposed outcome measures were approved by Executive Management for consideration on by the Commission and approved at the February 2020 Quarterly Commission Meeting. The proposed measures utilize VA data on adjudicated claims, including success rates and length of time for claim decisions. Data from these proposed measures will be entered into the VetraSpec data management system to establish historical data that can be used for future LBB key measures.
Page 8, Lines 2–17; Page 10, Lines 19–27	2.3	Remove the military service requirements for veteran county service officers (VCSOs) to expand the pool of potential accredited claims counselors for Texas veterans, and require counties to use and develop a veterans preference.	No Action Necessary VCSO's are county employees and not subject to TVC oversight. Section 434.033(b) language was changed, removing the military service requirements.
Page 8, Line 20 to Page 9, Line 11; Page 11, Lines 1–11	Added by the Legislature	Requires TVC's mental health program director to have at least a master's degree in a recognized mental health field, be licensed in Texas to practice a mental health profession, have multiple years of postgraduate experience in a human services setting, and have experience in providing trauma-informed care. Also requires TVC to give preference to a candidate with at least two years of trauma-informed care experience. Specifies that these eligibility requirements apply only to an individual appointed on or after the September 1, 2019, and specifies that an individual appointed to the position before September 1, 2019 cannot hold that position after September 1, 2021 if they do not meet the requirements.	Complete A Veterans Mental Health Director was hired with all the newly established requirements on 04/01/2020.

Senate Bill 607 Summary

Established in the Texas Constitution in 1946 and housed at the General Land Office (GLO), the Veterans' Land Board (VLB) provides land, home, and home improvement loans; long-term nursing care; and burial and interment services to veterans and their families. As a constitutionally-created board, VLB is subject to review, but not abolishment under the Sunset Act. Rather, the Sunset Commission focused on strengthening VLB's procurement and contracting operations, since the board contracts for the administration of many of its large programs, including the servicing of its home loan program and the construction and operation of its veterans nursing homes and cemeteries. Senate Bill 607 updates standard good government requirements related to board member training and separation of responsibilities, and specifies that VLB will be subject to review, but not abolishment, again in 2031. Other commission recommendations require VLB to ensure all of its contracting processes adhere to best practices, including requiring board oversight of significant contracts, establishing and implementing consistent contract monitoring policies, and improving training of project managers on how to monitor contractor performance.

The following material summarizes results of the Sunset review of VLB, including management actions directed to the agency that do not require legislative action.

Issue 1 — Contracting

- Recommendation 1.1, Adopted — Direct VLB and GLO staff to work together to develop and require regular training for staff involved in the VLB contracting process to effectively monitor contracts. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 1.2, Adopted — Direct VLB to work with GLO to further develop written policies outlining clear authority over the board's contracting functions, including the roles of project management and other program staff. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 1.3, Adopted — Direct VLB and GLO to develop a framework for program staff to identify significant contract compliance issues and a clear process for requiring the reporting and documenting of these issues for review. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 1.4, Adopted — Direct VLB to develop and adopt written policies establishing criteria for all levels of contract review, including board review of contracts over \$1 million. Additionally, direct VLB to receive briefings from the GLO Director of Contract Management at least once a year regarding the status of all contracts under \$1 million. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 2 — Governance

- Recommendation 2.1, Modified — Update the standard across-the-board requirement related to board member training, including a requirement for each board member to attest to both receiving and reviewing the training manual annually.
- Recommendation 2.2, Adopted — Apply the Sunset across-the-board recommendation regarding policies to separate policymaking and staff functions.

-
- Recommendation 2.3, Adopted — Continue the VLB loan reporting requirement.
 - Recommendation 2.4, Adopted — Update VLB’s statute to reflect the requirements of the person-first respectful language initiative.
 - Recommendation 2.5, Adopted — Direct VLB to ensure stakeholders have access to board information and the public has an opportunity to appear before the board by May 1, 2019. (Management action – nonstatutory)
 - Recommendation 2.6, Adopted — Direct VLB to track complaint data and make the complaint process accessible to the public by March 15, 2019. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Texas Veterans Land Board Implementation of Sunset Changes, SB 607

The Veterans Land Board (VLB) was established in 1946 and works with the local community and fellow Veterans service organizations to ensure that no Veteran is ever left behind. The VLB provides access to land, home and home improvement loans, Texas State Veterans Cemeteries, Texas State Veterans Homes (TSVH) and the strongest veterans benefits package in the nation. Below is an overview of our programs and services available to Texas Veterans, Military Members and their families.

Texas State Loans

The Veterans’ Land Board runs a truly unique program for the state of Texas, giving Texas Veterans the opportunity to borrow money to purchase land at below-market interest rates while only requiring a minimum 5% down payment. In addition, Veterans can also receive low interest rate home and home improvement loans.

The VLB offers Veterans and Military Members land loans up to \$150,000 on properties that are one acre or more. VLB also offers Veterans below-market interest rates on housing and home improvement loans. Housing loans of up to \$510,400 can be originated in conjunction with a VA guarantee. Home improvement loans up to \$50,000 are available for repairs and updates made to a Veteran’s primary residence.

Under Commissioner Bush’s leadership, the VLB has distributed over \$3,210,314,814 in home loans, and \$51,518,263 in home improvement loans. Over \$489,218,499 has been dispersed in land loans.

The Veterans Land Board also provides Veterans benefit information and assistance services through the statewide call service center. In FY2020, the VLB responded to 30,426 calls and 2,689 emails and in FY2019 they responded to 36,640 calls and 2,575 emails.

In July of 2020 the VLB launched a virtual assistant using IBM Watson Artificial Intelligence, fondly named Maverick, to provide Veterans with faster access to answers and help them access the benefits they’ve earned. From VLB home improvement loans to questions on Texas State Veterans Homes, Maverick will provide the responsiveness needed in these unique times.

Texas State Veterans Homes

The VLB's Texas State Veterans Homes provide affordable, long-term nursing care for Texas Veterans, their spouses and Gold Star parents. Because the VA subsidizes much of a veteran's cost to stay in a VLB Texas State Veterans Home, daily out-of-pocket rates are well below average and include the cost of medications for most Veterans. We currently operate nine (9) Veterans Homes across the State of Texas, and the VLB Board has approved a 10th Texas State Veterans Home in Tarrant County. This facility will reflect a small "neighborhood" concept and will include 120 private and semi-private rooms. The DFW area has the highest underserved Veterans population in the State of Texas, which is one of the determining factors when the VA awards construction grants for new Veterans homes. The number of Veterans aged 65+ in the DFW area is over 115,000.

The Texas State Veterans Homes are self-supporting and thus, cost Texas taxpayers virtually nothing. Funding for the Homes comes from a combination of VA per diem, aid and attendance, Medicare, Medicaid, third-party insurance and private pay.

The Texas State Veterans Homes, managed by the VLB, have been significantly impacted during the COVID pandemic. The VLB has worked closely with its third-party operators to ensure that all protocols issued by the Center for Disease Control, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and Department of Veterans Affairs continue to be enforced at the Texas State Veteran Homes.

At the onset of COVID-19, the VLB immediately took proactive actions to mitigate the spread of the virus and closed visitation to family members only. Later, state and nationwide directives recommended prohibiting *all* visitors, including family members, from entering nursing facilities, with the VLB immediately adopting these policies.

The VLB has ensured all personnel and staff in the home have been issued ample PPE. Additionally, the VLB has required residents who have come into close contact with individuals testing positive for COVID-19 to be placed in isolation. Strict protocols for treating COVID-19 positive residents have been implemented as we continue to provide the highest quality of care for our Veterans. Residents and staff are tested according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) and HHSC guidelines which bases the frequency of testing upon the county positivity rate and when any new positive case is identified.

As a further precaution, the VLB required our operators to ensure all staff and vendors undergo temperature checks and acknowledge that they did not exhibit symptoms of COVID-19, prior to being allowed entry to a VLB facility. Additional measures implemented by the VLB and our operators included:

- Procurements of hand sanitizer, COVID-19 test kits, and PPE as supplies became available.
- Required operators to provide the VLB with a COVID-19 action plan for all Veterans Homes under their jurisdiction.
- Limit staff entry to one entrance in the building to ensure accurate monitoring.

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- Require vendors entering the facility to disclose if they have been to a COVID- 19 positive location prior to entering a TSVH facility.
 - Suspend all staff travel.
 - Suspend all non-emergency construction or repairs.
 - Require any newly admitted or readmitted residents be placed in quarantine for 14 days.
 - Implementation of daily COVID-19 Task Force conference calls for Homes impacted, consisting of appropriate VA staff, including treating physicians, VLB/GLO executive staff, Nursing Home executive staff, and a representative from the Texas Department of State Health Services.
 - Requests made to the Department of Veterans Affairs to immediately transfer residents testing positive for COVID-19 to VA hospitals to prevent the spread of COVID-19 inside the facility.
 - Hired a pandemic advisor to review and advise the response and directives to the Home operators to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

In accordance with directives by HHSC and the Emergency Rule issued in September, Texas State Veterans Homes re-opened on Monday, October 12, 2020 to essential caregivers and for end of life visitation.

TSVHs receive revenue from various sources, which is based on occupancy. Prior to March 2020, the average occupancy at the TSVH was 95 percent. Since March 2020, the occupancy has averaged 88 percent and, as of September 2020, is down to 76 percent. This reduction affects both the GLO and the providers who operate the Veterans' Homes. From March 2020 through the end of fiscal year 2021, the GLO estimates a reduction in revenue of over \$25 million. To mitigate this loss, the GLO has requested \$30 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds from the Governor's Office and LBB, or to continue to use funds that were temporarily transferred to the agency for Harvey-FEMA cash-flow if CRF funds are not available.

In addition, TSVH are incurring COVID-19 related costs, primarily due to purchasing personal protective equipment (PPE) and COVID-19 tests that are required by local mandates. In fiscal year 2020 these costs totaled \$2.0 million with another \$11.1 million dollars of expected costs through the end of fiscal year 2021.

The GLO/VLB is largely covering costs of testing and PPE using the \$7.1 million in Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds received and through partial reimbursements for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). The GLO has worked within its own budget in order to cover unexpected costs, to include drawing down over \$3.0 million in Earned Federal Funds to cover immediate costs. The funds are largely reserved to fund the unexpected up-front costs from disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and wildfires. Continuing to use Earned Federal Funds will inhibit the agency's ability for these and other unexpected costs due to the administration of disaster programs.

Texas State Veterans Cemeteries

The Veteran's Land Board also oversees and operates 4 Texas State Veterans Cemeteries across Texas. These cemeteries are hallowed grounds that are an expression of our respect for the Texas

men and women who have served with distinction. The Texas State Veterans Cemeteries were built through a partnership between the State of Texas and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and are managed by the Texas Veterans Land Board.

The Texas Veterans Land Board has taken steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at all four Texas State Veterans Cemeteries. The Central Texas State Veterans Cemetery in Killeen, the Coastal Bend State Veterans Cemetery in Corpus Christi and the Texas State Veterans Cemetery at Abilene are supplementing standard operating procedures through social distancing requirements, use of PPE, and are following local safety protocols. However, due to current active COVID-19 cases, the Rio Grande Valley State Veterans Cemetery in Mission continue to conduct direct burials only. This action, along with the enforcement of continued safety measures, is necessary to reduce the risks to cemetery staff and the public.

The following measures will be implemented based on local conditions for Mission:

- Only direct burials will be conducted.
- To ensure the safety of local all-volunteer Military Service Detachments and Department of defense military honors teams, no military honors will be conducted at this time.
- Family and next-of-kin may have services and military honors conducted later.
- All Veterans Cemetery administrative offices are closed to in-person customer contact.
- Enhanced cleaning measures in line with the Center for Disease Control and the World Health Organization's recommendations are in place.
- Cemetery staff must wear a face mask or covering, practice appropriate social distancing measures, and comply with recommended cleaning and disinfectant protocols.

Unaccompanied Veterans Program

The Unaccompanied Veterans Program was implemented in January 2015, for eligible Veterans with no known next-of-kin or those with next-of-kin who are unable to attend, to ensure earned military honors are rendered with dignified services at Texas State Veterans Cemeteries. Prior to the implementation of this program, Veterans were brought into the cemetery and provided “direct no witness” burials. This meant their remains were brought to the cemetery and directly buried or interred with no honors, attendees, or recognition of their military service.

All eligible Veterans are now interred with honor and dignity, regardless of where they may have found themselves in life. The absence of next-of-kin may occur for a variety of reasons, to include but not limited to:

- The Veteran's next-of-kin may have all passed away and survivors cannot be located.
- The Veteran may have separated themselves from next-of-kin due to family discord.
- The Veteran may suffer from mental illness or other health issues leading to societal isolation.

For safety reasons, the VLB has not promoted an unaccompanied Veteran burial since the onset of COVID and under normal operating procedures, Texas State Veterans Cemeteries follow a standard protocol to schedule burial services for Unaccompanied Veterans. This includes

cultivating relationships with community stakeholders including funeral homes, county services, local judges and Patriot Guard Riders to ensure all eligible Veterans are given honorable and dignified burial services at each cemetery. While notice times vary, the Texas Veterans Land Board issues an advisory to the community upon verification of an Unaccompanied Veteran Burial.

Prior to COVID-19, local communities provided significant and overwhelming support for the Unaccompanied Veterans Program, with considerable public attendance at services to honor the Veteran during this last rite of passage. The Unaccompanied Veterans Program stands as a testament to the respect and understanding these communities have to the value of the military family. Together as a community, we can guarantee that NO Veteran is EVER left behind.

The Mail Drop Campaign

The Mail Drop campaign is centered around creating community engagement with Veterans who reside in our Texas State Veterans Homes run by the Veterans Land Board. The program seeks to generate awareness within our community and encourages them to interact in a socially distant manner with the men and women who admirably served our great nation. Although America's Veterans often receive recognition on significant holidays and events, the men and women who dedicated their lives to our nation and the ideals of freedom should be remembered each and every day.

Mail Drop encourages community members of all ages to write letters, draw a picture, or hand-make cards for our Veterans to show them we are grateful for their service. Community members are asked to write a Veteran near them in one of our nine Texas State Veterans Homes in Amarillo, Big Spring, Bonham, El Paso, Floresville, Houston, McAllen, Temple, and Tyler. Protocols for disinfecting mail are in place at all nine of our homes. Community members who wish to participate can receive information regarding how to address your "Mail Drop" letters on our website at VLB.Texas.Gov/MailDrop. In just under six weeks of announcing the program, over 1,740 community members have signed up to write and honor our Texas Veterans.

Voices of Veterans Oral History Program

The "Voices of Veterans" program seeks to record the stories of Texas Veterans through their time in service and after returning home from combat. The Oral History program seeks to record the stories of Texas Veterans and archive their stories in the Texas General Land Office for future researchers, historians, genealogists and the general public. Voices of Veterans ensures these stories of courage and service can inspire Texans for generations to come.

Many Veterans struggle to find meaning in their work after service. In 2019, Next Gen Warriors was formed, with the intent to capture the stories of Iraq and Afghanistan era Veterans and provide inspiration to others as they step off the battlefield and into civilian life. This new program reminds Veterans that their service continues to make an impact on the people of Texas, even though it might not make headlines or save lives. The General Land Office is committed to capturing our warrior's success stories and encouraging the next generation of Texas Veterans. To communicate with Veterans of a different era, viewers can tune in on Instagram (@VoicesofVets), YouTube, and podcasting platforms.

Compliance with Sunset

Please find attached the following charts and supporting documentation for the agency's implementation of the Sunset Recommendations for the VLB:

- 1) Commission Recommendations – Management Action Items
 - a) Chart listing the Sunset Management Action Items and the status and actions the agency has taken to implement the recommendations
- 2) Documentation Request – Management Action Items
 - a) Supporting documentation for the implementation of the Sunset Management Action Items
- 3) Implementation Chart – Statutory Items
 - a) Chart listing the Sunset Statutory Items and the status and actions the agency has taken to implement the recommendations
- 4) Implementation Docs – Statutory Items
 - a) Supporting documentation for the implementation of the Sunset Statutory Items

As the Texas Veterans population continues to grow, we look forward to seeing even more service members in our great state and are excited to work with the men and women of the United States Military to find housing and land so that they too can make Texas home. While this is a brief overview of all the services that the Veterans Land Board has to offer, this concludes this report. We look forward to continuing to serve Texas's Veterans, and ensuring that no veteran is ever left behind.

Sunset Advisory Commission Recommendations Veterans' Land Board

We will be reviewing the following Sunset recommendations:

Implementation Status of Sunset Advisory Commission Management Actions				
Veterans' Land Board				
Issue Number	Management Action	Implementation Status	Implementation Date Or Expected Implementation Date	Comments/Contact
1.1	Direct VLB and GLO staff to work together to develop and require regular training for staff involved in the VLB contracting process to effectively monitor contracts.	Fully Implemented	Contract Management: 8/31/2020 VLB-Land and Housing: 1/1/2020 VLB-Texas State Veterans Homes: 1/2/2020 VLB-Texas State Cemeteries: 5/1/2020	<p><u>Contract Management</u>: Implementation for this recommendation is a team effort between the Contract Management Division (CMD), the Office of General Counsel, Financial Management and Human Resources. CMD alone does not have the authority to require Project Management training across the agency. Between the three divisions, a team has been formed to develop an overall plan for Project Management Training. The team last met on January 10, 2020, and decided to implement the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A list of Project Managers, by division, will be generated and sent to the Program Areas for verification. 2. Project Managers will be required to attend four hours of Project Management specific training per year. This is in addition to the 12 hours of required training the GLO currently requires. 3. CMD, Financial Management, and Procurement will be responsible for each creating one hour of training related to Project Management. The fourth hour will be developed by Human Resources and will be General Project Management training. <p>Implementation Date: 8/31/2020 Contact: Kelly McBride, Kelly.McBride@glo.texas.gov</p>

				<p>Land and Housing: VLB Land and Housing program project manager and program Director will participate in the training developed by the GLO contract management division when it is scheduled by the contract monitoring team. In the meantime, the Program Manager for the VLB Land and Housing program is scheduled to attend Certified Texas Contract Manager training provided by the Comptroller office January 14-15, 2020.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 1/1/2020 Contact: Charlotte Mumphord, Charlotte.Mumphord@glo.texas.gov</p> <p>Texas State Veterans Homes: The Texas State Veterans Homes division maintains two staff members who are CTCM certified and Participate in regular continuing education units.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 01/02/2020 Contact: John Berkely, John.Berkely@glo.texas.gov</p> <p>Texas State Cemeteries: Texas State Veterans Cemeteries (TSVC) staff will consult with the GLO Contract Management division to assess training needs and identify available training resources for TSVC staff. The TSVC program will utilize identified training resources that are aligned with the responsibilities of assigned project managers to ensure effective contract monitoring and/or oversight. Additionally, TSVC staff will develop formal program-level training policies and/or guidelines to ensure compliance with the stated objectives.</p> <p>Implementation Date: 5/1/2020 Contact: Eric Brown, Eric.Brown@glo.texas.gov</p>
1.2	Direct VLB to work with GLO to further develop written policies outlining clear authority over the board's contracting functions, including the roles of project	Fully Implemented	<p>VLB-Land and Housing: 10/18/2019</p> <p>VLB-Texas State Veterans Homes: 1/2/2020</p>	<p>VLB Policies on the (1) Review and Approval of Major Contracts and (2) Contract Management Monitoring Compliance and Training were considered and approved at the January 23, 2020 Board meeting.</p>

	management and other program staff.		<p>VLB-Texas State Cemeteries: 9/2020</p>	<p>Land and Housing: The program has developed written policies for the program area contract monitoring process. These procedures were developed with input from contract management and are effective 10/8/2019. Contact: Charlotte Mumphord, Charlotte.Mumphord@glo.texas.gov</p> <p>Texas State Veterans Homes: The Deputy Director and Program Administrator are the Project Managers for the TSVH program. Each area of contract deliverables has a staff member to review compliance of the contract, i.e. Operations, Nursing, Financial, Construction Services, and Pharmacy. Each staff member generates a report based on specific checklist/monitoring tools of their findings which are reported to the appropriate authority. The Contract Monitoring tool is the master document that records operational compliance and deliverables. Implementation Date: 1/2/2020 Contact: John Berkely, John.Berkely@glo.texas.gov</p> <p>Texas State Cemeteries: Texas State Veterans Cemeteries (TSVC) staff will consult with the Contract Management Division and General Counsel (GC) to ensure clearly defined roles and responsibilities of project managers and program staff are in place. The TSVC will coordinate with CMD and GC prior to drafting a policy to ensure the program area effectively addresses the process for communicating significant changes or amendments to the Board. Implementation Date: 9/2020 Contact: Eric Brown, Eric.Brown@glo.texas.gov</p>
1.3	Direct VLB and GLO to develop a framework for program staff to identify significant contract compliance issues and a clear process for requiring the	Fully Implemented	<p>VLB-Land and Housing: 1/31/2020</p> <p>VLB-Texas State Veterans Homes: 1/31/2020</p>	<p>Land and Housing: VLB Land and Housing program has developed written policies for the program area contract monitoring process. These procedures include processes for reporting compliance issues. Implementation Date 1/31/2020. Contact: Charlotte Mumphord, Charlotte.Mumphord@glo.texas.gov</p>

	reporting and documenting of these issues for review.		VLB-Texas State Cemeteries: 9/2020	<p><u>Texas State Veterans Homes</u>: The Policy & Procedure for the TSVH contract monitoring tool identifies overall non-contract compliance with the contracted operators. The P&P also requires the Deputy to provide repeated non-compliance written notice to VLB Legal and Executive Management depending on the level of non-compliance. Implementation Date 1/31/2020. Contact: John Berkely, John.Berkely@glo.texas.gov</p> <p><u>Texas State Cemeteries</u>: Staff will develop clear processes for identifying and reporting compliance issues to appropriate agency staff. TSVC staff will ensure the inclusion of comprehensive procedures to "actively" track and maintain a record of identified compliance issues until resolution. This information will be made immediately available to applicable staff and will be fully accessible to both VLB and GLO contract management staff. TSVC staff will also work with GC to ensure any monitoring and tracking processes implemented are aligned with the stated objectives and intent. Implementation Date: 9/2020 Contact: Eric Brown, Eric.Brown@glo.texas.gov</p>
1.4	Direct VLB to develop and adopt written policies establishing criteria for all levels of contract review, including board review of contracts over \$1 million. Additionally, direct VLB to receive briefings from the GLO Director of Contract Management at least once a year regarding the status of all contracts under \$1 million.	Fully Implemented	<p>VLB-Land and Housing: 8/31/2020</p> <p>VLB-Texas State Veterans Homes: 1/2/2020</p> <p>VLB-Texas State Cemeteries: 5/1/2020</p>	<p>VLB Policies on the (1) Review and Approval of Major Contracts and (2) Contract Management Monitoring Compliance and Training were considered and approved at the January 23, 2020 Board meeting.</p> <p><u>Land and Housing</u>: VLB Land and Housing program has developed written policies for the program area contract monitoring process. These procedures include processes for reporting compliance issues. The Project Manager shall maintain a contract compliance report to monitor and document any compliance issues for all VLB Land and Housing Contracts in accordance with the contract compliance and resolution processes as outlined in each contractual instrument. Implementation Date: 8/31/2020</p>

				<p>Contact: Charlotte Mumphord, Charlotte.Mumphord@glo.texas.gov</p> <p><u>Texas State Veterans Homes</u>: The Policy & Procedure for the TSVH contract monitoring tool identifies overall noncontract compliance with the contracted operators. The P&P also requires the Deputy to provide repeated non-compliance written notice to VLB Legal and Executive Management depending on the level of non-compliance. Implementation Date: 1/2/2020 Contact: John Berkely, John.Berkely@glo.texas.gov</p> <p><u>Texas State Cemeteries</u>: Texas State Veterans Cemeteries (TSVC) staff will develop clear processes for identifying and reporting compliance issues to appropriate agency staff. TSVC staff will ensure the inclusion of comprehensive procedures to "actively" track and maintain a record of identified compliance issues until resolution. This information will be made immediately available to applicable staff and will be fully accessible to both VLB and GLO contract management staff. TSVC staff will also work with GC to ensure any monitoring and tracking processes implemented are aligned with the stated objectives and intent. Implementation Date: 5/1/2020 Contact: Eric Brown, Eric.Brown@glo.texas.gov</p>
2.5	Direct VLB to ensure stakeholders have access to board information and the public has an opportunity to appear before the board by May 1, 2019.	Fully Implemented	FY2020	<p>GLO has updated the VLB's webpage to provide an overview of the VLB's roles and responsibilities. The webpage also notes that Board meetings are held on a quarterly basis that are open to the public. The webpage lists the upcoming meeting date, time, and location and provides for a link to the live webcast of the meetings made available to the public. Additionally, it provides for instructions for where to view Board meeting agendas, which are "posted in the Texas Register and can be accessed via the Texas Secretary of State website". The website states that agendas must be posted seven working days prior to a Board meeting. Public comment will be</p>

				added to future VLB meetings, in which the public will be given the opportunity to speak if needed.
2.6	Direct VLB to track complaint data and make the complaint process accessible to the public by March 15, 2019.	Fully Implemented	FY2020	The VLB has made available a "Compliments & Complaints" button located on the "Contact VLB" page of the VLB website where the public has an opportunity to file a complaint. The button redirects users to GLO's main website's Compliments/Complaints form, where they have opportunity to file a complaint electronically. Also, on the "Contact VLB" webpage are instructions on submitting anonymous complaints via the agency Fraud hotline. Once a complaint is submitted through GLO's online form it will automatically be input into GLO's master complaint tracker. Received complaints are auto generated into email once the form is submitted. All complaints received through this process to HR on a monthly basis. When a VLB-related complaint is received via the GLO's online compliment/complaints form, an email is sent to the VLB Deputy Director subject of the complaint and request a response within 5 days. After receiving a response from the VLB, complaint information is sent to the LBB within 10 days of receipt.

**Implementation Chart
Veterans Land Board**

[S.B. 607 by Watson \(Flynn\)](#)

[Staff Report with Final Results](#)

Bill Reference	Recommendation Number	Bill Provision	Implementation Status
Page 1, Line 21 to Page 2, Line 23; Page 3, Line 20 to Page 4, Line 6	2.1	Update the standard across-the-board requirement related to board member training. Require board members to acknowledge review in addition to receipt of the training manual. Require existing board members to complete training on the subjects added by the act by December 1, 2019.	<p>Implemented</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VLB board members receive a training regarding VLB programs and strategies. The Board members complete acknowledgement forms of the training and the review of the VLB Manual upon completion. <p>Documentation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VLB 2.1 – VLB Member Training, Table of Contents VLB 2.1 – (J. Scott) New Board Member Training Acknowledgment Form. Acknowledgments from the Chairman and Grant Moody were not required since they were already on the Board. VLB 2.1 – Signed Training Manual Acknowledgments
Page 3, Lines 2–3	2.4	Update VLB's statute to reflect the requirements of the person-first respectful language initiative.	<p>On-going / Pending Legislative Action</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Sunset Commission's Final Report states that the Texas Legislative Council will be directed to revise the VLB's governing statutes to conform to the person-first respectful language requirements found in Chapter 392, Texas Government Code. The direction is located on page 42 of the Commission's report. It is the VLB's understanding and interpretation that this direction would be made by the Commission.

**Implementation Chart
Veterans Land Board**

[S.B. 607 by Watson \(Flynn\)](#)

[Staff Report with Final Results](#)

Bill Reference	Recommendation Number	Bill Provision	Implementation Status
Not in bill because continuing in statute an existing provision.	2.3	Continue the VLB loan reporting requirement.	Implemented (Continuous); No Action Necessary
Page 1, Lines 16-20	2.2	Apply the Sunset across-the-board requirement regarding separation of duties.	Implemented <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The VLB implemented a policy summarizing the Boards procedure and practice applicable to various contracting functions including Contract Management, functions, monitoring, compliance, and the training of VLB staff who manage contracts. ▪ Per statute, the Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office serves as the Chairmen of the VLB. Both the duties as Commissioner and the duties as Chairman are outlined by statute. Documentation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VLB 2.2 - VLB Contract Management, Monitoring, Compliance, and Training Policy. Pg. 2, Section 4: Chairman of the Board
Page 1, Lines 12-13	Continuing Sunset review	Update VLB's Sunset provision by requiring Sunset to review the board during the 2031 review cycle and every 12th year after.	No action needed

House Bill 1326 Summary

As the state agency that oversees the training and readiness of the state's military forces, the Texas Military Department (TMD) plays a vital role in responding to international military deployments and to both state and national disasters. The Sunset Commission focused on the internal management and operations of the department as the state agency that supports its outward-facing public service mission. As a result, House Bill 1326 continues TMD for 12 years and clarifies statute to better integrate state administration into TMD's leadership structure and ensure broader oversight across all of the department's diverse state support operations, programs, and functions. Other Sunset Commission management actions provide a course correction for several department programs using significant state funding, including the Texas State Guard, the Texas Challenge Academy for at-risk youth, and the state-funded tuition assistance program for guard members.

The following material summarizes results of the Sunset review of TMD, including management actions directed to the agency that do not require legislative action.

Issue 1 — Continue and Governance

- Recommendation 1.1, Modified — Continue the Texas Military Department for 12 years and ensure the adjutant general will continue operations of Texas military forces even if the department is abolished, by removing language expiring a subchapter of Government Code Chapter 437.

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- Recommendation 1.2, Adopted — Clarify the adjutant general’s responsibility over all aspects of the department and strengthen internal oversight of state administration.
 - Recommendation 1.3, Adopted — Direct the adjutant general to improve supervision and support of the department’s state employees. (Management action – nonstatutory)
 - Recommendation 1.4, Adopted — Direct the department to review and update its administrative rules. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 2 — Purchasing

- Recommendation 2.1, Adopted — Direct the department to improve planning and implementation of purchasing policy changes, including scheduling policy updates based on risk and ensuring all staff involved in purchasing have information needed to carry out their duties. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 2.2, Adopted — Direct the department to track and report performance of all phases of the purchasing process. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 2.3, Adopted — Direct the department to develop a process for programs to share information about timelines and needs to prioritize purchasing workload across the department. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 3 — Texas State Guard

- Recommendation 3.1, Adopted — Direct TMD to evaluate State Guard missions and establish strategies to support the program and protect the state’s interest. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 3.2, Adopted — Direct the department to provide State Guard members with access to the department’s ombudsman for voicing general program concerns. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 4 — Challenge Academy

- Recommendation 4.1, Adopted — Direct the department to identify specific options for relocating the Sheffield campus no later than January 1, 2019, with a goal to preserve federal funding and other Challenge program benefits for Texas' at-risk youth. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 4.2, Adopted — Direct the department to close the Texas Challenge program's Sheffield campus in March 2020, regardless of whether relocation is feasible. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Issue 5 — State Tuition Assistance

- Recommendation 5.1, Adopted — Direct the department to establish updated goals to target the use of limited state tuition benefits and collect information needed to measure performance. (Management action – nonstatutory)
- Recommendation 5.2, Adopted — Direct the department to update informational materials and training to ensure recruiters and potential applicants receive accurate information about state tuition benefits. (Management action – nonstatutory)

Texas Military Department Implementation of Sunset Changes, HB 1326

Texas Military Department failed to respond to the committee's November 10th, 2020 deadline requesting information. The committee was disappointed that TMD did not respond in a timely matter.

The Adjutant General- agency head of the Texas Military Department (TMD) has assumed responsibility for all administration of TMD as reflected in the agency organizational structure and operational documents defining, clarifying or depicting the agency chain of command. The title "Executive Director" has been removed and replaced by the title "Director of State Administration." The Adjutant General has appointed a senior-level employee as Director of State Administration; established this position as a direct report to the Adjutant General; and adopted a policy (Texas Military Department Terms of Reference) outlining this position's responsibilities. The Adjutant General meets weekly with the Director of State Administration on issues related to state employees and/or state issues, as well as state operations support activities.

The Director of State Administration manages and serves as the administrative head of the Office of State Administration (OSA) which handles daily the TMD's state support functions, including: budget, finance, purchasing and contracting, property and fleet management, human resources, payroll, information technology and security, state grants administration, cooperative agreement oversight and compliance, internal audit coordination, and CAPPS (Centralized Accounting and Payroll/Personnel System) administration. The Director of State Administration reports to and serves at the pleasure of the Adjutant General; and performs responsibilities in accordance with statutory and delegated authority.

Texas Military Preparedness Commission Implementation of SB 1443

Following the end of last legislative session, the Texas Military Preparedness Commission complied with SB 1443 that eliminated outdated Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grants (DEAAG) scoring criteria. Texas Administrative Codes were amended to comply with the statutory changes.

The commission took actions on the dates below:

- 07-15-2019 The Commission met in a public meeting and started the review of the new rules.
- 08-02-2019 The rules were published in the Texas Register for public comment. No public comments were received but one question was submitted and was sent a response.
- 09-30-2019 The Commission met in a public meeting and voted to approve the new rules.

During the July 15, 2019 meeting, the commission also discussed and voted on new, relevant DEAAG scoring criteria. Each defense community gave input through their TMPC commissioner for new criteria. The public was also allowed to make comments at the meeting. Following the deliberations, the commission held a unanimous vote on the new criteria. The new criteria is more in line with current Department of Defense basing priorities.

The new DEAAG scoring criteria is below:

- Military value of the proposed project
- Likelihood of project completion
- Dual military/community benefit
- National Defense Strategy support of the proposed project
- Funding contributions from other sources
- Significance of Impact – adversely affected communities will receive preference
- New missions
- Resiliency
- Installation cost/efficiency

This past July, the TMPC completed their biennial report found at <https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/military/TMPC-Biennial-Report-2019-2020.pdf>. Printed copies of the report will be delivered to the legislature at the start of next session in January. As part of the report and in partnership with the Comptroller's Office, a new economic impact study was completed showing Texas military installations have over a \$123 billion impact on the states' economy with over 227,000 DoD uniformed and civilian employees at 15 installations and the headquarters for Army Futures Command.

TMPC also provided the committee with a new Texas military fact sheet show on the next page.



Texas Military Preparedness Commission Office of the Governor Military Installations Across Texas 2020

MISSION

Established in 2003 by the 78th Texas Legislature, the mission of the Texas Military Preparedness Commission (TMPC) is to preserve, protect, expand, and attract new military missions, assets, and installations in the state of Texas. Additionally, the TMPC encourages defense related businesses to expand or relocate to Texas.

U.S. AIR FORCE

Dyess Air Force Base - Bomb Wing and Airlift Wing

Goodfellow Air Force Base - Firefighting and Intelligence Training

Laughlin Air Force Base - Specialized Undergraduate Pilot Training

Sheppard Air Force Base - Allied/Specialized Flight and Technical Training

U.S. ARMY

Corpus Christi Army Depot - Helicopter Repair Center of Excellence

Fort Bliss - Ground Combat Maneuvering and Artillery Training

Fort Hood - Ground Combat Ready Force and Helicopter Training

Red River Army Depot - Mechanized Track Vehicle and MRAP Repair

Army Futures Command - Modernization of Army Warfighting

ELLINGTON FIELD - Reconnaissance, Intelligence, and Air Support Missions

U.S. NAVY

Naval Air Station Corpus Christi - Primary and Advanced Multi-Engine Pilot Training

Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth - Fighter, Airlift, Intelligence, and Refueling Missions

Naval Air Station Kingsville - Strike Pilot Training

JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO

Fort Sam Houston - Military Medicine & HQs

Lackland Air Force Base - Basic and Technical Training

Randolph Air Force Base - Instructor Pilot, Advanced Instrument Flight Training, and Remotely Piloted Aircraft Training

Variable	Total Impact
Employment (Department of Defense)	226,555
Employment (Direct & Indirect)	633,892
Output to the Texas Economy (in billions)	\$123.7
GDP (in billions)	\$75.3
Disposable Personal Income (in billions)	\$39.2

Source: Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2019

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Texas recognizes and appreciates the impact military installations have within defense communities and the state. In 2019, the TMPC, in partnership with the Texas Comptroller's Office, conducted an economic analysis to quantify the impact military installations have on the state's economy. For more information, please visit <https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/economic-data/military/>.

For more information on the TMPC's economic incentive programs, please visit <https://gov.texas.gov/organization/military>.



Charge 2.

Study the mental health treatment options available for all Texas veterans, including efforts to fill gaps left by federal government. Make recommendations for future legislation streamlining mental health treatment coordination among federal, state, and local agencies.

Texas Health and Human Services Commission

The Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) has implemented the following veteran mental health treatment programs:

The Mental Health Program for Veterans (MHPV)

Pursuant to Health and Safety Code Section 1001.222, HHSC and the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) coordinate to administer MHPV. This program provides peer counseling services to service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF) through contracts with local mental health authorities (LMHAs), local behavioral health authorities, and Texas A&M Health Science Center.

The program also administers a pilot that provides for direct mental health services from military culturally competent licensed mental health professionals trained in military informed care, called Veteran Counselors. This pilot is currently implemented at six LMHA sites across the state, focused in rural areas with high need.

The MHPV services include:

- Employment of Peer Service Coordinators who conduct the following:
 - Assess military culturally competent and military trauma informed community providers and refer veterans to appropriate providers
 - Provide one-on-one peer support as trained through the MHPV
 - Provide group peer support as trained through the MHPV
 - Are trained in suicide awareness and prevention measures, how to use tools to accurately screen for suicidal ideation, and which resources should be utilized following a screening; train peers or make training available to peers for suicide prevention
 - Establish connections with providers in local communities, including Veterans Affairs providers, to raise awareness of mental health treatment options in local communities
 - Provide peer support to justice involved veterans and connect them with mental health services where available and appropriate

- Employment of Veteran Counselors in a pilot program, currently at six pilot sites, who:
 - Are trained in military cultural competence, military informed care, and military-related trauma;
 - Provide direct mental health services to SMVF for issues stemming from military-related trauma; and
 - Are trained in suicide awareness and prevention measures, and how use tools to

accurately screen for suicidal ideation, and which resources should be utilized following a screening.

- Funding for TexVet.org, which is an assessed directory of resources including culturally competent and military-trauma informed providers.
- Funding for the Veteran Mental Health Department at TVC, which provides training and technical assistance to community members and providers, including cultural competence training and training in military informed care, coordination of care for justice involved veterans, and training to community and faith-based organizations.

The Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program (TVFA)

The TVFA Grant Program awards grants to community collaborative projects to expand the availability, increase access, and enhance the delivery of mental health treatment and services through coordinated services and treatment for veterans and their families. With awarded grant funds, donations, and contributed in-kind goods and services, TV+FA grantees implement projects to:

- Provide new, enhanced, or expanded, military-informed mental health services to veterans and their families; and
- Provide and coordinate supportive services essential to the provision of mental health services as part of a continuum of care implemented by a developing or existing community collaborative to address mental health needs of the community's veterans and family members.

Services and treatments provided to Texas veterans and family members with the support of TV+FA include:

- Evidence-based therapies and treatment;
- Individual, group, family and couples peer support services;
- Suicide prevention initiatives to help community members, veterans, and their family members develop awareness and skills in recognizing, assisting, and referring to mental health services;
- Treatment of substance use disorders;
- Individual and family counseling; and
- Navigation services such as case management and referral services.
- TV+FA funding supports activities essential to the provision of mental health services including:
- Family-related services, including child care;

-
- Emergency financial support;
 - Transportation;
 - Housing;
 - Infrastructure costs, such as telemedicine equipment; and
 - Training for staff and health care providers, including training in military-cultural competence or evidence-based practices that directly impact the number of veterans and family members served during the grant period.

The TV+FA grant program seeks to empower local communities to identify and address the mental health needs of veterans and family members. Grant funds are intended to be a catalyst for communities to develop and support sustainable partnerships, collaborative relationships, and coordinated service delivery systems that continue to operate after the life of the TV+FA grant.

Five grant phases have been implemented over the life of the program, resulting in the award of over \$46 million in state funds to support 74 grant projects across the state.

Private Stakeholder Responses to Charge 2

Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute

The Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute (MMHPI) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans Affairs' request for information on Interim Charge #2. Our response has four components: (1) the impact of COVID-19 on veterans; (2) maintaining services while examining existing programs; (3) embracing innovation; and (4) looking at lessons from other populations.

1. Impact of COVID-19 on Veterans

In June, MMHPI and the Cohen Veterans Network (CVN) issued a report indicating that for every 5% increase in the national unemployment rate, as many as 550 additional U.S. veterans could be lost to suicide annually (over the pre-COVID baseline rate of about 6,700 annually), and 20,000 more veterans could suffer from substance use disorder (over the pre-COVID baseline rate of about 180,000 annually) as compared to pre-COVID levels. The report was developed to inform the efforts of policymakers and health systems as they prepare for potential increases in short-term and long-term mental health and addiction needs. Proactive efforts can address these needs before they reach crisis levels, improving and saving lives.

In addition, CVN released the America's Mental Health Pulse Survey in April 2020, which revealed that 70% of Americans are worried about their physical health due to COVID-19, and 58% of Americans are concerned about their mental health because of social distancing. Additionally, the survey indicated that while 14% of the general population sought mental health care during COVID-19, more than 50% sought mental health care in the military-connected community.

Although many veterans continue to experience impacts related to COVID-19, unemployment has been improving. In October 2020, the veteran unemployment rate was 5.9%, down from 6.8% in September. The same month, the comparable non-veteran unemployment rate was 6.8%. Yet, this is still an increase from 2019, when the veteran unemployment rate was 3.1% (the lowest in 19 years); it is almost twice as high and will impact veteran mental health.

MMHPI released a separate report showing that better access to two services – Collaborative Care in primary care settings for depression and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for opioid use disorders – could save more lives than would be lost to COVID-related deaths from suicide and opioid overdose.

2. Maintain Services, Examine Existing Programs

Given the impacts of COVID-19, the Texas Legislature’s commitment to meeting the mental health needs of veterans and their families has never been more important. This support is critical because we know that nearly 60% of veterans receive health care outside of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for many reasons including personal preferences, geographic constraints, eligibility barriers, and provider shortages. We also know that there are “significant gaps in the availability of community-based providers educated in both military/veteran culture and in the unique mental health and suicide risks of the Veteran population.” The Texas Legislature has created programs that address both of these issues. As such, in the face of significant constraints on the state budget, we must ensure that programs that provide mental health services to veterans and their families are not reduced.

At the same time, there is no better time to examine existing programs and ensure they are operating in a way that maximizes the benefits to Texas veterans and their families. We recommend that the committee focus on protecting and improving three programs: (1) the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program; (2) the Mental Health Program for Veterans; and (3) the Veterans Mental Health Grant Program of the Texas Veterans Commission.

Texas Veterans + Family Alliance

The Texas Veterans + Family Alliance (TV+FA) grant program provides \$20 million in state funding that is matched at the local level. The program, established through 84(R) SB 55, aims to improve the quality of life of Texas veterans and their families by expanding the availability of, increasing access to, and enhancing delivery of mental health services and treatments. To date, TV+FA has provided \$57 million in state funding across 114 grants and collaboratives, which have served more than 67,000 veterans and family members. This critical provides essential mental health services to veterans and family members across the state. MMHPI recommends that it be maintained at \$20 million in funding for the FY 2022-23 biennium.

Mental Health Program for Veterans

The Mental Health Program for Veterans (MHPV), established through 81(R) SB 1325, includes the provision of peer services to service members, veterans, and their families through the

Military Veteran Peer Network. In 2015, the Texas Legislature required the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to coordinate with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) to administer MHPV. Except for a small portion retained by HHSC for administrative costs, most of the \$5 million per year in General Revenue for MHPV is contracted out. The committee should examine MHPV and the services provided by the Veterans Mental Health Department at TVC, which receives more than \$1 million per year of the MHPV funding. The committee should also examine the efficacy of the contracting process, parts of which have not changed significantly since the program's inception.

Veterans Mental Health Grant Program

The Veterans Mental Health Grant Program at TVC is “comprised of two service categories that collectively provide counseling and treatment to veterans and their families in addressing diagnosed conditions in order to improve their quality of life, relationships, outlook, and successful integration with their communities.” This grant program is one of four at TVC with expected funding of \$30 million across all grant programs for 2021-2022.

The committee should note the status of grant renewals for organizations that are funded through the Veterans Mental Health Grant Program. Current grantees were not eligible to apply for the next round of funding and, instead, can only be considered for renewal. Yet, “to be eligible for such consideration, grantees must meet both performance and expenditure benchmarks and have no outstanding compliance issues on the 3rd Quarter Performance and Expenditure Report.” Many of these organizations, however, have been dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 not only on their operations but on the veterans and family members they serve. Consider this summary of the impacts from one major provider of services in a critical area of the state:

The pandemic caused all face-to-face operations to come to a halt. This meant no outreach, education, or meetings until we learned to operate virtually. As we made the shift to virtual, we saw a significant reduction in the number of people we were reaching, much less serving. As we lifted from the 100% virtual, we were still operating at limited capacity. We had to limit face-to-face appointments, which caused a reduction in walk-ins. Beyond the reduced outreach, walk-ins were a portion of how we got connected with veterans and were often veterans who had the most need. All of the metrics we set for ourselves were based on a normal environment before knowing what COVID-19 was. The performance metrics that now guide grant renewals to serve veterans and their families are based on projections that did not include COVID-19 impacts.

While TVC is inquiring about the impacts of COVID-19 on organizations, there is still the distinct possibility that many organizations that play key roles in providing mental health services for veterans and their families across Texas may not be considered for funding by TVC. The committee should request information from TVC regarding this situation and provide guidance to TVC based on the information received.

3. Embrace Innovation

In addition to supporting and examining the existing work the state is doing to support veterans and their families, there are three new areas the committee should consider: (1) ETS

Sponsorship; (2) Universal Screening of Service Member/Veteran/Family Member Status; and (3) Faith-Based Supports.

ETS Sponsorship

When service members make a permanent change of station (PCS) as part of their service in the U.S. Army, which is a move to a new place for duty, their new unit provides them a PCS sponsor to help them make transitions in critical domains such as job responsibilities, housing, family transition, social/physical activities, and location of medical treatment. However, there is not a similar program for service members as they reach their expiration term of service (ETS) or retire from service. ETS Sponsorship is a public-private partnership that synchronizes the efforts to engage transitioning service members six months prior to ETS. Members are matched with certified and volunteer sponsors in their post-military hometowns who connect them to community networks to reduce transition stressors related to housing, employment, community connection, family matters, and medical care. Support for this initiative is important because the transition back to the civilian community can be challenging as service members lose the benefits of military service such as camaraderie, support, and structure, which can lead to increased stress, a decreased sense of purpose, and an elevated risk for suicide and other mental health concerns.

The committee can play a leadership role in encouraging communities across the state to recruit sponsors for service members who want to make Texas home after their military service ends. The committee can also ensure key supports for ETS Sponsorship, such as the Texas Veterans Network that is overseen by the Texas Workforce Commission, have the resources they need to operate as envisioned.

Universal Screening of Service Member/Veteran/Family Member Status

One of the key steps that in the recommendations from the President’s Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) is to “improve community-provider screening practices to identify veteran status.” The committee should examine ways to require health care providers to screen for service member, veteran, or family member status. It should also require state agencies to screen for service member, veteran, or family member status whenever it interacts with members of the public to provide services.

Faith-Based Supports

Faith-based supports play an important role in the continuum of mental health supports that should be available to veterans and their families. While TVC has one employee supporting work in this area, the committee consider expanding this support to one per region. Moreover, the committee should ensure that faith-based supports are an area of focus by making it an explicit part of mental health grant programs for veterans and their families.

4. Lessons from Other Populations

Last legislative session, the Texas Legislature prioritized the mental health needs of Texas

children. The committee should consider how such legislation could be applied to veterans and their families. 86(R) SB 11 (Taylor), for example, established the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium to foster collaboration among the state's medical schools, with a focus on Texas children. The committee should consider the viability of establishing a Texas Veterans Mental Health Care Consortium. Many medical schools in the state have strong relationships with the VA to support their residency programs, and other states leverage their academic institutions to support veterans. The Consortium launched the Texas Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN), so pediatricians and primary care providers can consult with a network of mental health professionals to help better care for Texas children with mental health needs. The committee could consider a Veteran Psychiatry Access Network, which could potentially be supported by the VA.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to provide data-based information and recommendations to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans Affairs. MMHPI stands ready to serve as a resource as you gather information and consider actionable solutions for your interim charges.

Canine Companions for Independence

Founded in 1975, Canine Companions for Independence is a non-profit organization that enhances the lives of people with disabilities by providing expertly trained service dogs and ongoing support to ensure quality partnerships, free of charge.

Canine Companions® has six regional centers across the country. The Canine Companions at Baylor Scott & White Health – Kinkeade Campus, located in Dallas/Fort Worth, serves the state of Texas.

Canine Companions assistance dogs are expertly trained in over 40 commands to assist with daily tasks such as retrieving items, turning on and off lights, opening and closing doors, pulling a manual wheelchair and more.

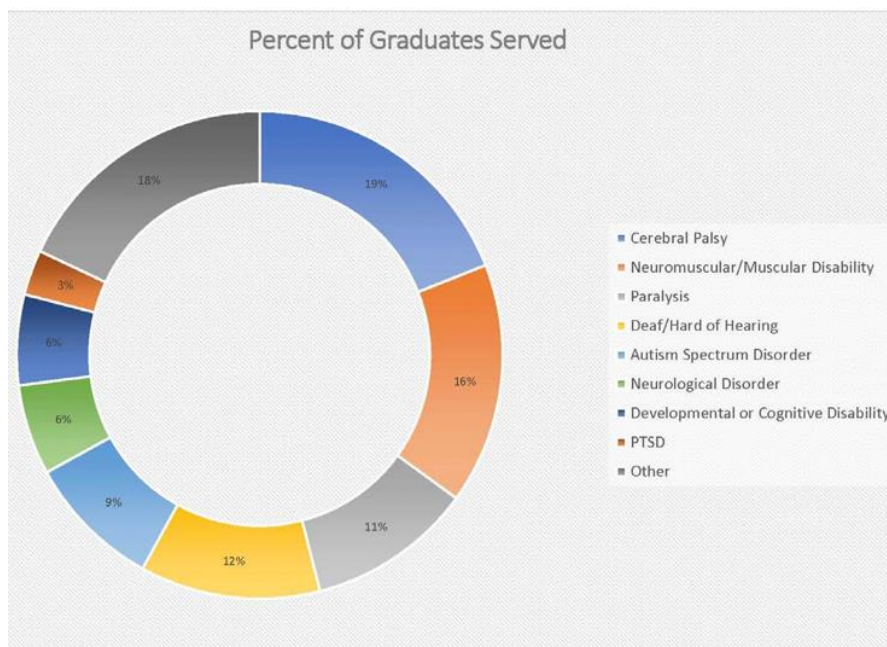
Service dogs for veterans with PTSD are trained in a unique set of commands.

Who we serve:

- Veterans- Veterans with physical disabilities, hearing loss or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are matched with service dogs for greater independence.
- Professionals - Facility dogs are expertly trained and partnered with a working professional in a health care, visitation, therapeutic setting, including work with veterans.
- We serve more than 65 different kinds of physical, cognitive and developmental disabilities.

The Canine Companions Veterans Initiative

Canine Companions has a long history of serving veterans with physical disabilities or hearing loss. In 2018, after participating in a research study with the Department of Veterans Affairs, Canine Companions launched a pilot program to directly place service dogs with veterans with PTSD. Dogs placed through the Veterans Initiative can assist a veteran in a variety of ways, helping with daily tasks or mitigating the symptoms of PTSD. Canine Companions also has facility dogs serving veterans. (VA's, physical or occupational therapy)



Service Dogs

Service dogs serve adults with physical disabilities, including veterans. Dogs are trained in over 40 commands to assist with daily tasks and enhance independence.

Tasks include:

- Retrieving dropped or out of reach items and delivering to handler
- Items as small as a credit card and as large as a crutch or prosthesis
- Tugging open and pushing closed doors, drawers, refrigerators and more
- Turning on and off lights
- Pulling a manual wheelchair
- Much more

Service Dogs for Veterans with PTSD

- Canine Companions expanded its Veterans Initiative to train service dogs for veterans with PTSD
- Trained in commands specifically identified to mitigate the symptoms of PTSD
- Program has expanded to Texas

Tasks include:

- Positional commands including “front” and “behind” to create space for the handler
- Retrieving medication
- Anxiety interruption
- Nightmare interruption
- Entering a room to turn on lights before handler enters

100% report feeling more independent, confident and happy since receiving their service dog.

95% report a reduction in symptoms of PTSD since receiving their service dog.

85% report feeling increased safety since receiving their service dog.

30% report decreasing medication since receiving their service dog.

Sound Off

Sound Off is a 501(c)(3) incorporated in San Antonio which operates a proprietary telemedicine platform that allows Texas Veterans and Service Members the ability to develop long-term relationships with Clinicians or screened and trained peers we call Battle Buddies - all while maintaining complete anonymity. In doing so we address the primary barriers to treatment Veterans and Service Members face when considering seeking mental health support: stigmatization and concern over professional blowback. 47% of those Veterans and Service Members who would qualify as having Major Depression or PTSD do not seek help. This inherently means for all the efforts and funds expended at the federal, state, and local community level - half of those suffering the most are never even getting in the door. We are organizationally focused on addressing this problem. We have worked with the Texas Veterans Commission over the last several years, as well as numerous grant recipients of both Texas Veterans Family Alliance and Texas Veterans Commissions Mental Health Grants. There are a number of legislative means by which the State could support this effort.

THE PROBLEM WE SEEK TO ADDRESS

Nearly half of Veterans and Service Members suffering the most never seek help; many others who seek help are unable to effectively engage. The reasons are well studied and documented.

In 2016, roughly 17 Veterans killed themselves per day; the often cited 22 per day was most recently revised in September 2019 reflecting 2017 data and a parsing of various types of Veterans. While this decrease is positive, it conceals an actual increase in suicide rate among Veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2018). Forty-seven percent of those Veterans who would likely meet the diagnosis of major depression or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) do not seek help. Of the 53 percent who do seek help, only half receive “minimally adequate care” (Tanielian et al. 2008). These numbers are only reinforced when one reviews the

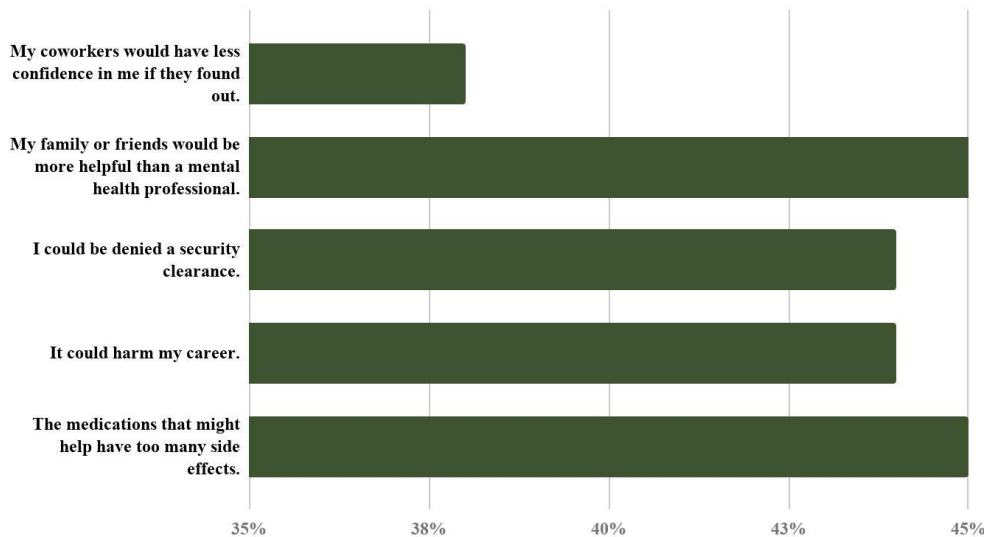
broader literature on Service Members who need help but do not seek it (Acosta et al. 2014):

Table 3.2
Studies on Service Members Who Need Mental Health Treatment but Do Not Seek It

Source	Sample	MHD	Percentage with Clinically Significant Symptoms but Not Seeking Help	Help-Seeking Period
Hoge, Castro, et al., 2004	Members of four U.S. combat infantry units (three Army units and one Marine Corps unit)	Major depression, generalized anxiety, or PTSD	72.9	Past year (postdeployment)
Milliken, Auchterlonie, and Hoge, 2007	U.S. soldiers returning from Iraq who completed both a postdeployment health assessment and a postdeployment health reassessment	People referred to mental health treatment (disorders not specified)	45.2	90 days
Invisible Wounds (Schell and Marshall, 2008; Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008)	Representative of deployed forces	PTSD or depression	47.3	Past year
Invisible Wounds (unpublished results from 2011) (see Chapter Four)	Guard and Reserve members in Western Pennsylvania who had been deployed since 2003	Major depression, PTSD, alcohol problems, or suicidal ideation	54.0	Past year

Billions of dollars have been spent attempting to develop treatments for PTSD and its related conditions. (Blakeley and Jansen, n.d.) Unfortunately, little attention is given to structuring that treatment in such a way that Veterans are culturally, psychologically, and logistically willing to access it.

The top reasons (majorly-depressed and PTSD) Veterans do not seek help are well studied: (Tanielian et al. 2008)



It is worth noting the strong emphasis on “stigma” related barriers is consistent across the literature (Acosta et al. 2014):

The data above does not address the factors that may keep those who *are* seeking support from effectively engaging. Within this demographic we would highlight two other major factors:

-Geography: The mean distance of Veterans to the nearest U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facility capable of providing mental health support is more than 15 miles (Hussey et al. 2015). Approximately one quarter of American Veterans live in areas designated as rural by the US Census Bureau (Holder, n.d.).

-Bureaucracy: While VA wait times for mental health services have improved, the General Accountability Office and VA Inspector General have questioned the validity of these findings. Anecdotal evidence would indicate many Veterans struggle with seeing clinicians in a timely manner

Table 3.1
Factors That Affect Decision to Receive Mental Health Services (%)

Factor	Marine Corps COSC Study (2012)	DoD Health Related Behaviors Survey (2011)	Navy Quick Poll (2010)	Navy Quick Poll (2011)	Hoge, Castro, et al. (2004)	Invisible Wounds of War (2008)
It would harm my career.	36.5	37.7	Officers: 37	Officers: 33	50	43.6
Members of my unit might have less confidence in me.	49.8	—	—	—	59	38.4
My unit leadership might treat me differently.	45	—	Officers: 45 Enlisted: 42	Officers: 40 Enlisted: 38	63	23.0
I would not be able to keep my security clearance (quick polls) or I will not be able to obtain a security clearance in the future (Invisible Wounds).	—	—	Officers: 14 Enlisted: 9	Officers: 18 Enlisted: 13	—	43.6
I do not think that my treatment would be kept confidential.	37	—	—	—	—	29.0

SOURCES: Momen, Strychacz, and Viirre, 2012; Barlas et al., 2013; Newell, Whittam, and Uriell, 2010, 2011; Hoge, Castro, et al., 2004; Schell and Marshall, 2008.

(National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine et al. 2018).

Finally, one category of Veterans fall into a particularly precarious position: Other Than Honorable (OTH) Veterans. OTH Veterans are those discharged at a status below General or Honorable - approximately 6.5% or 125,000 of post 9/11 Veterans have “bad paper.” Many criticize this process as being unequally and inconsistently applied; Marines are ten times more likely to be “ineligible” than Air Force Veterans (Veterans Legal Council 2016). The VA and many Veteran Service Organizations provide limited or no support to OTH Veterans and their families – leaving tens of thousands of Veterans suffering without support. While the VA and

Department of Defense (DoD) are working to reform this gap, too many who have served our country remain helpless.

Sound Off summarizes the above succinctly: Veterans and Service Members, particularly those most in need of support, do not seek help, or are unable to effectively engage support. This is due to four major reasons: a desire for anonymity, lack of trust in physicians, geographic accessibility, and bureaucracy.

ANONYMITY TRUST GEOGRAPHY BUREAUCRACY

The community working to support Veterans and Service Members focuses too much attention on simply how to diagnose and treat PTSD and its related conditions. It is only natural that we have devoted resources to that which can be most easily controlled. However, it is simplistic and unrealistic to place the burden of seeking help on those who are most vulnerable and lacking a support network. We must adapt our approach to address those issues that both data and intuition tell us are keeping these men and women from seeking the help they need. To state the obvious, if they do not seek help, the probability of them getting the help they need declines significantly, and adverse and irreversible outcomes become more likely.

WHAT IS SOUND OFF?

Sound Off allows Veterans and Service Members the ability to develop relationships with specific clinicians or peers while maintaining their anonymity.

Sound Off is a system which allows Veterans and Service Members seeking mental health support to speak repeatedly, and anonymously, with one of a cadre of mental health professionals or a screened and trained peer, a “Battle Buddy.” We pair an IT-infrastructure with a network of mental health professionals and a peer support network of Veterans. Sound Off does not compensate the peers nor mental health professionals on our platform. The preponderance of the support network work pro bono — a benefit that provides unparalleled scalability — however an increasing number of partner Veteran Service Organizations who have mental health professionals or trained peer support providers on staff are placing them on our platform. Users access the IT-system predominantly through a mobile application. The system allows for text-based communication, used predominantly for logistical planning, and Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP)-based calls. Video conferencing is intentionally excluded to maintain the anonymity of the Veteran or Service Member.

The application only requires the Veteran or Service Member to provide their state of residence in order to pair them with a medical professional licensed in their state. The Veteran or Service Member is provided an anonymous yet consistent username through which they access the application and “pair” with a specific mental health professional or Battle Buddy. We provide the user with a short background on available clinicians and Battle Buddies so they may make an informed decision before entering into a relationship. The system is not legally required to be HIPAA compliant (per guidance from Sound Off’s pro bono counsel), but all text communication handled by Sound Off is end-to-end encrypted and hence “invisible” to Sound Off.

UNIQUE ANSWER

Sound Off directly addresses the major barriers preventing Veterans and Service Members from seeking help.

Sound Off uniquely addresses all four of the major factors keeping Veterans and Service Members from seeking help:

— There has never been a mental health delivery model that allowed both for repeat contact (essential for treatment) *and* anonymity. From the perspective of the Veteran or Service Member, their interaction is completely contained within a mobile phone application. There is no waiting room, hotline to call, confirmation of status, or computer registration. Sound Off asks for one detail, the user's state, while allowing for frequent, personal contact similar to any traditional telemedicine session.

— Sound Off allows users to speak directly with a mental health professional, or, should they prefer, a screened and trained Veteran (or both). Most organizations focus on either mental health professionals *or* peers. By offering both, we are able to draw those in who may not yet be comfortable speaking with a professional by giving them the opportunity to speak with a peer, and then subsequently internally transition them to a professional, should they so choose.

— Sound Off has no geographic barriers. While we must comply with state laws regarding practice of medicine (in the case of mental health professionals), we make uniquely efficient use of our cadre of mental health professionals by connecting persons potentially thousands of miles apart.

— Sound Off's registration process is approximately 30 seconds from download to entering a "relationship" with a mental health professional. We allow any Veteran — regardless of service status — to sign up.

TEXAS LAUNCH AND EXPANSION

Sound Off went live across Texas in January 2020. Sound Off is currently fundraising to support an aggressive statewide outreach effort.

After a brief Pilot in late 2019, Sound Off went live to all Texas Veterans and Service Members in January 2020. The application is available on Android and iOS. An initial body of approximately a dozen Clinicians, including those on staff with 22Kill, were available and nearly three dozen MVPN trained Battle Buddies. Outreach to Veterans and Service Members has been almost exclusively via word of mouth and organically driven social - almost no money has been spent reaching our Veteran Audience.

As Sound Off transitions from an intentionally limited launch to seeking to support more Veterans and Service Members in Texas, our capital requirement to drive outreach has grown.

Sound Off is currently in the midst of a \$1.2m capital raise to launch a multi-medium Outreach

effort to recruit more Clinicians, more Battle Buddies, and more Veterans to our platform. Our objective with this funding is to be the largest non-governmental facilitator of mental health support to Texas Veterans and Service Members.

OUR EFFORTS TO ENGAGE WITH STATE RESOURCES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Sound Off has attempted to engage with two primary channels of State support of Veterans.

Military Veteran Peer Network

We have attempted to enhance and leverage MVPN. We have sought to leverage MVPN basic training as the basis for our “Battle Buddies”. We have sought to understand the Network: who it contains, what vetting exists, what training has been done - all with the aim of connecting those Peers with Veterans who are struggling. Unfortunately, it is fairly evident that the “Network” is an amorphous entity; we have been told that it is made up of those persons on milvetpeer.net. I have personally reviewed this website and the persons within it. The website is designed for club management, is hardly engaged by participants, and contains persons trained and not trained. When we requested information on who had been trained through Peer Coordinators it was initially unclear whether that data existed; TVC ultimately conceded they didn’t have a precise answer. Ultimately they indicated that they could not reveal members of MVPN because they were Veterans (this despite the fact that the milvetpeer.net contains many non-Veterans) and state law prevented disclosure of Veteran information - to which I simply asked what the point of creating a “network” of Peers was if nobody could know who it contained.

The Military Veteran Peer Network is fundamentally non-functional as a network. The peer coordinators may conduct effective peer training or support, but there is simply no “network” to the Military Veteran Peer Network.

We want to empower the peers the State is training to easily and effectively engage with Veterans - we are spending considerable resources every day to optimize making these types of connections. The state has invested tremendously in training thousands of Peers - they are simply mismanaged and underutilized as a “network”.

Texas Veterans Family Alliance Grant Funding and Texas Veterans Commissions Mental Health Funding

We hope to be able to empower these grant recipients to reach Veterans and Service Members via our platform. This requires no State funding to Sound Off nor increase in State funding to any other party, simply a more flexible approach to funding already being directed toward this problem. Specifically, allowing these grant recipients to count time on platforms like Sound Off - which allow anonymous engagement with Veterans and Service Members - would empower 47% of Veterans who are not currently engaging with help to do so. The historic bias toward requiring documentation of past service like a DD-214 was understandable, but that was prior to the recognition that this very documentary requirement was acting as a tremendous barrier to men and women seeking help.

We credit Health and Human Services for indicating that there is no inherent requirement for grant recipients to provide proof of Veteran Service. Our request would be legislation stating plainly that time on Sound Off - or similar platforms - would count toward fulfillment of clinical centers operating with TVFA contractual requirements.

TVC Mental Health funding identification requirement is more clear. Our request would be that for Clinicians providing support on Sound Off - or similar platforms - this documentary evidence requirement be waived in place of an affidavit by the Clinician that they believe they are supporting a Texas Veteran.

Sound off exists to empower other organizations to reach an audience that is left without somewhere they can feel safe accessing support. We hope to help empower the State's tremendous investment in Texas Veteran mental health support to reach this audience. We need to work together to think differently about this problem; given the increasing suicide rate of Texas Veterans, thinking differently about how we are addressing this problem would seem prudent.

Combined Arms

Transition from military service is complex, and can be a mentally and emotionally taxing process for veterans. One review of recent population survey studies found that 44% to 72% of military veterans experienced high levels of stress during transition out of the military service, citing difficulties securing employment, difficulties adjusting to the nature of civilian employment versus military culture, relationship conflicts within the family system or with friends, broader interpersonal relationships, legal difficulties, and general adaptation to the schedule of civilian life (Morin, 2011, as cited by Mobbs & Bonanna, 2018).

A major shortfall in the availability of mental health treatment for transitioning veterans is that currently available interventions are too narrowly focused. At present, the Veteran's Administration (VA) mandates prioritization of prolonged exposure (PE) and cognitive processing therapy (CPT) for PTSD, resulting in providers who are highly skilled in these interventions and a large portion of funding going towards PTSD research and optimizing PE and CPT programs within the VA. While access to mental health treatment for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is paramount for members of the military population who have experienced both combat and non-combat related trauma and meet criteria for this diagnosis, empirical studies show that that PTSD typically occurs in a relatively small population of returning veterans (Mobbs & Bonanna, 2018).

What this means for transitioning veterans is that the specific, immediate mental health needs associated with transition stress have been overlooked or marginalized by programs at the federal level. According to the Pew Research Center (2011), the current generation of Post 9/11 veterans struggles more with transition than veterans serving during any other conflict or peace time period in between. Transition stress has been linked to later development of mental and physical health concerns, including suicidal ideations (Interian, Kline, Janal, Glynn, & Losonczy, 2014; Kline et al., 2010, as cited by Mobbs & Bonanna, 2018). Most first-time suicide attempts in the veteran population occur after separation from the military, making the availability of

appropriate mental health services and interventions even more crucial during the transition period.

Combined Arms is well prepared to quickly provide veterans with vetted mental health resources through an interactive technology platform, a network of veteran organizations, and a centralized co-working space. For example, mental wellness is the 4th most requested service among Combined Arms' clients – resolving over 1,183 mental wellness requests in a three year window (Combined Arms Client Data). Responsive to these needs, Combined Arms invests heavily in mental health resources, allocating nearly 20% of its resources to mental wellness. This makes mental wellness Combined Arms' second largest service category ranked by number of resources.

In addition, Combined Arms was selected by the George W. Bush Institute's Military Service Initiative to develop an innovative solution for connecting more veterans to effective care for the invisible wounds such as PTSD, TBI, depression, etc. Specifically, the Bush Institute's Veteran Wellness Alliance has united 15 organizations nationally to connect more veterans to high quality care for the invisible wounds by linking high quality clinical care programs and veteran peer networks. The Alliance consists of seven best-in-class Peer Networks, such as The Mission Continues, Team Rubicon, Wounded Warrior Project, and Student Veterans of America who collectively represent over 1.1 million Post 9/11 veterans, and eight

high quality clinical partners across the public and private sectors who deliver care at various locations throughout the country. The Veteran Wellness Alliance partnered with Combined Arms to pilot the use of the Alliance's referral/connection tools and strategies through a pilot program called Check In that is currently operating throughout Texas, Florida, and Colorado. Through Check In, a veteran peer, who sees a buddy struggling, can connect their buddy to care by using the Combined Arms mobile application, sending an email, or making a phone call.

Then an expertly trained advocate will reach out directly to the veteran in need and help him/her get connected to the right care program across all of the Alliance partners. The VWA believed that Combined Arms was an ideal partner, given that Combined Arms has: (1) An extensive directory of vetted resources; (2) Several potential entry points for veterans in need of resources (self-directed, non-clinical assessments online, phone calls, and walk-ins to a brick and mortar facility); and (3) Thorough vetting and accountability process for organizations that participate in the network. Overall, Combined Arms's interstate partnerships, like with VWA, gives it extra opportunities to increase access to high-quality clinical care beyond its own body of clients.

Additionally, the Texas Veterans Network was established by the Texas Workforce Commission in 2020 in order to collectively achieve Governor Abbott's vision to make Texas the first interconnected state for veterans and families in the United States. In order to achieve this vision, Combined Arms was selected to launch the Texas Veterans Network to help connect military, veterans, and their families to the federal, state, and local government agencies plus the litany of community-based nonprofit organizations providing services. The objective is to not only ensure the clients have faster, more effective access to mental wellness services but to also reduce confusion in the selection of resources and reduce the redundancy and fragmentation among the veteran-serving agencies by holding them accountable. When paired with the Bush Institute's

Veteran Wellness Alliance, the Texas Veterans Network has the potential to dramatically increase access to mental wellness services in the State of Texas for military, veterans, and their families. Both of these programs can be accessed through the dynamic, ever-evolving Combined Arms system (Texas Veterans Network).

In conclusion, Combined Arms' recommendation for the Committee is to help ensure the state agencies that serve veterans and families are not only aware of incredible resources like the Veterans Wellness Alliance and the Texas Veterans Network but also actively incentivizing their employees to refer clients into the Combined Arms system (Texas Veterans Network).

Emergence Health Network

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony and information on behalf of Emergence Health Network (EHN) related to the mental health treatment options available for all Texas veterans. As the largest mental health provider and Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic in El Paso County, we currently have 19 locations where we provide trauma-informed services to a wide array of our population, to include over 700 military veterans in the last couple of years. Through our Veterans One-Stop Center, Counseling Services, Military Veterans Peer Network and Addiction Services, we strive to deliver complete care for veterans in need.

Mental Health Treatment Options Available in El Paso

Funded by grants from Health and Human Services, EHN created the first of its kind, Veterans One-Stop Center (VOSC) in El Paso to help improve access to mental health and support services for area veterans and their families. The Veterans One-Stop provides outpatient behavioral health services, stigma reduction trainings and community presentations, a Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN), DAV-187 assistance with benefits and claims, and support in furthering education through Grand Canyon and National Universities. By carrying out thorough screenings of each veteran who comes through our doors, our staff provides referrals to community partners, with solid and warm hand-offs to prevent anyone from falling in the cracks of the system and ensure proper and timely services for everyone. Any Veteran who has served our country, regardless of service era or discharge status, is eligible for services at our VOSC. Moreover, all therapy services at the Veterans One-Stop are provided by a licensed therapist. Common diagnoses treated include PTSD, Major Depressive Disorder and Generalized Anxiety Disorder. We are also able to work with clients who have more severe mental health issues that include chronic Suicidal Ideations, Bipolar Disorder and Schizophrenia. Modalities that are used at the One-Stop primarily focus on trauma, anxiety and coping with the symptoms of PTSD. These include EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), Motivational Interviewing and Marriage therapy. The clinical needs and progress of the client determine the length of treatment provided at our Veterans One-Stop Center. On average, the length of clinical services is about 3-6 months.

In addition, case management helps our clients receive the most benefit out of their treatment while receiving services at the One-Stop. The case manager provides empathy and support by offering resources and assistance throughout their treatment. Resources from case management can include housing, financial education, food pantries, furthering education, navigating the VA

Healthcare System, and career assistance. Our treatment team consists of a Case Manager and a Therapist. They both meet weekly to ensure that our clients are receiving holistic care to address all their needs.

The Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN) also offered under the VOSC, promotes peer support through volunteerism and lived experiences. This program is offered to Service Members, Veterans and Family Members. MVPN includes Peer Support Groups, 1:1 Peer Support, volunteer opportunities, training for individuals interested in providing peer support and stigma reduction trainings, and referrals to community resources. Currently, we serve Service Members, Veterans and their dependents through the MVPN.

EHN Recommendations

The VOSC has been effectively providing services to veterans in the El Paso area since 2016. Throughout this time, there has been an increased need to develop a system for all the organizations around the community to know about the different services available and what partnering organizations offer to fill in the gaps when needed. Bearing this in mind, we recommend the committee considers legislation to establish a digital directory and software program to be utilized by all Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) where we could make referrals to each other's agencies, establishing effective resource navigation. This software could also provide data regarding the referral process, number of veterans served, follow through from organizations, and data that could potentially bring additional funding to communities across the state.

This program could help assess Veterans' needs to ensure they meet the appropriate criteria for each program and then would alert the referring agency to follow up to make sure the individual was able to access that resource and that it was, in fact, appropriate. Often times, Veterans get lost within the system, needing a service that a specific organization might not offer, and although we do our best to make good referrals, there are providers and services we do not know about, or some that the client might not qualify for. As many services are funded by grants with specific requirements, having a centralized location for Veterans to be screened and answer questions such as their type of discharge, era they served in, etc., would promote better referrals, follow up and collaboration as true community partners. This would offer a more valuable approach to treat the Veteran population in each region.

We often say there is never enough mental health services available, but if we have a centralized and updated database for providers, our communities will be able to more effectively cover veterans in need.

Cohen's Veteran Network

Cohen Veterans Network (CVN), a nationwide **non-profit** network of mental health clinics, has made a financial commitment to serve post-9/11 veterans and their families/military families by funding clinical services, outreach, case management, and administrative functions for all Cohen Clinics. CVN's wraparound services include, but are not limited to:

- In-person mental health appointments and statewide appointments via telehealth

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- Holistic, client-centered care for post-9/11 veterans regardless of discharge status or time in service, family members, National Guard and Reserves, as well as active duty families
 - Case Management services
 - Community and educational events

There is a clear and continued alignment of the mission and goals of CVN and the State of Texas, particularly with the Texas's Veterans Initiative and Texas Veterans Commission. CVN appreciates the opportunity to respond to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans Affairs' request for information on Interim Charge #2.

CVN's focus is to help Texas veterans, National Guardsmen, and military families build better lives through supportive programs and high-quality, evidence-based mental health treatment to address post-traumatic stress disorder, moral injury, suicidality, transition issues, and other related concerns. Additionally, providing expedient access to mental health services is a goal for both CVN and the State of Texas.

Of the existing 19 Cohen Clinics to date, CVN has invested in four Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics in Texas (Dallas, Killeen, San Antonio, and El Paso), with a statewide telehealth option.

Texas Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program

Historically, CVN has partnered with the State of Texas by way of the Texas Veterans + Family Alliance (TV+FA) grant program. This is a public/private partnership that helps sustain the Texas Cohen Clinics through generous matching funds (up to 50% of clinic costs in some cases).

These funds, alongside Mr. Cohen's philanthropy, support the daily operations and services of the mental health clinics for veterans and their family members and are vital to the long-term sustainment of the clinics. This public/private partnership not only ensures that the military and veteran communities have care options when they need them, but also ensures that social determinants of health are being addressed so that clients can return to being productive members of their local communities. As such, CVN requests that funding be maintained at \$20 million for the Fiscal Year 2022-23 biennium.

CVN in Texas

Cohen Clinics are currently providing mostly telehealth services due to the pandemic. To date, CVN has served 16,500 clients in Texas Cohen Clinics. Additionally, we have cared for over 24,000 veteran or military clients across the network since our inception 4.5 years ago. Even during the pandemic, we continue to have good clinical outcomes, low no-show rates, excellent customer feedback and high client engagement in care.

CVN is continuing to scale the organization to serve more clients, create more value and work to make a difference every day in Texas. The state's continued commitment to these goals could not be more important at a time when Texas is facing significant budget restraints due to COVID-19. Lawmakers must ensure that programs that provide mental health services to veterans and their families are not reduced.

Charge 3.

Study the potential impact of eliminating Regional Military Sustainability Commissions as an ineffective tool in assisting Texas military installations and their host defense communities with protecting the missions, operations, readiness, and resiliency of military installations. Identify new and enhanced strategies to replace the Commissions with land use limitations or restrictions, regulatory strategies, annexation powers, contractual agreements, or other tools to preserve military use areas inside and outside municipal boundaries.

Private Stakeholder Responses to Charge 3

Texas Association of Builders

On behalf of the Texas Association of Builders (TAB), I would like to submit the following preliminary comments regarding the Committee's interim charge 3. The protection of our state's military bases and their core missions is something we all appreciate and support. However, those protections must be balanced with the right an individual has in his or her property and with the important goal of housing affordability. It is from that angle that TAB approaches interim charge 3.

While we do not have a formal position regarding the potential impact of eliminating Regional Military Sustainability Commissions at this time (other than to point out that they create an effective way to establish advisory committees to help protect critical military missions of a base), it is our belief that there are plentiful land use powers in the current Texas statutes to protect military bases and their core missions. When used properly, these land use powers serve as an important tool to help the military attain their objectives, while striking a balance between property rights and housing affordability.

In addition to the obvious zoning and platting powers a city has within its jurisdiction, following is a list of current direct and indirect statutory protections for military bases:

- Ch. 241, Local Government Code: Counties and cities may zone around airports to protect landing/takeoffs and tracking systems. This includes military installations with runways.
- Sec. 240.032, Local Government Code: Upon the request of a United States military installation in Bexar County, the county may regulate outdoor lighting in any unincorporated territory of the county. [*Sec. 3000.002(c)(3)(B), Government Code, provides an exemption to 2019's HB 2439 (prohibition on governmental entity product mandates) to allow Sec. 240.032 to continue in full force.*]
- Sec. 232.108, Local Government Code: All counties have the authority to mandate the Model Subdivision Rules, which include setbacks and regulate the number of dwellings per lot. [*Sec. 232.108 of the Local Government Code allows counties to mandate the Sec. 232.023, Local Government Code requirements, which include the setbacks and ability to restrict the number of buildings per lot.*]
- Ch. 232, Local Government Code: Full county platting authority.
- HJR 132 (2009): Constitutional amendment passed by the voters in 2009 that allows cities and counties to acquire buffer zones around military bases through bonds. Done to promote the mission of military installations.

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- SB 2534, Section 2 (2009): The interagency task force on economic growth and endangered species requires the Comptroller to “create an advisory committee to assist the task force in identifying cost-efficient and effective recommendations for economic development and Endangered Species Act compliance in the Camp Bullis area in Bexar County.”
 - Sec. 397.007, Local Government Code: In order to facilitate interaction and understanding between property owners and nearby military installations, requires counties and cities in which a military base is located, to work closely with the military base to ensure that the most recent Air Installation Compatible Use Zone Study or Joint Land Use Study applicable to each military installation is publicly available.
 - Sec. 5.008(b), Property Code: Requires that the Texas Real Estate Commission seller’s disclosure note the preceding.
 - Sec. 43.0117, Local Government Code: Under the new annexation statutes, a city may annex for full or limited purposes, any part of the area located within five miles of the boundary of an active military base. Furthermore, the annexation proposition “shall be stated to allow the voters of the area to be annexed to choose between either annexation or providing the municipality with the authority to adopt and enforce an ordinance regulating the land use in the area in the manner recommended by the most recent joint land use study.”
 - US Fish and Wildlife regulates the removal of trees when endangered species are affected. This positively affects the Golden Cheek Warbler concerns of Camp Bullis and certain endangered species concerns of other military bases.

As one can see, there are numerous statutory protections in place to protect our military bases and their important missions. As the review of interim charge 3 moves forward, TAB respectfully asks you and the committee to consider the negative effect that unnecessary and unreasonable regulations have on housing affordability and property rights. We stand ready to help the committee and our military bases address any specific issues that arise, in order to address such issues in a limited yet effective way designed to balance the interests of the military with the rights of property owners.

Texas Mayors of Military Communities

Texas Mayors of Military Communities (TMMC) recommends statutory revisions to Chapter 397A of the Local Government Code (LGC), Regional Military Sustainability Commissions during the 87th Legislature.

TMMC is a coalition of Texas defense communities created to advocate on behalf of Texas’ military installations, its active duty personnel, civilian employees, contractors and their families. These 15 military installations and the Army Futures Command are located across the state in more than 30 cities and counties. According to the 2019 Comptroller’s Economic Impact

Analysis, the financial impact of Texas military installations to the State is greater than that of agriculture and produces more than \$123.6 billion in economic output and \$75.3 billion in annual Gross Domestic Product. Nearly 634,000 direct and indirect employees (active duty, civilians, reservists, private sector contractors, suppliers, and service providers) in every corner of Texas support an irreplaceable backbone of national security and homeland defense missions that protect the lives of every Texas resident. In many of these 30 Texas cities and counties, the Department of Defense (DoD) is the top employer and DoD's presence is a catalyst for additional growth and jobs in defense related industries such as cyber, medical, manufacturing and aerospace.

One of the primary goals of the TMMC is to protect the missions conducted on Texas military installations from urban encroachment, specifically any development which interferes or threatens the continued execution and/or growth of military operations. As stated in Chapter 397A LGC regarding the need to protect the areas around military installations: "Without adequate regulation the areas will tend to become incompatible with military missions and will be used in ways that interfere with the proper continued use of those areas as secure locations for military installations and missions..."

TMMC believes that as currently written, the Regional Military Sustainability Commissions in Chapter 397A LGC would not protect Texas military installations, would become an unnecessary bureaucratic burden, if implemented, and would result in the loss of military missions in Texas. The lack of utility of the current version of a Chapter 397A Commission is validated by the fact that it has never been implemented anywhere in the decade since it has been the law. In fact, this bill was found to be unworkable by the 2009 Camp Bullis Joint Land Use Implementation Committee in the City of San Antonio, a city that hosts the largest joint base in the DoD. Additionally, Guadalupe and Bexar Counties and cities adjacent to Randolph AFB concluded that the bill was unworkable in 2015. Other TMMC concerns with this statute are contained in the attachment.

The TMMC recommends considering the elimination of Regional Military Sustainability Commissions, which have proven to be an ineffective tool in assisting Texas military installations and their host defense communities with protecting the missions, operations, readiness, and resiliency of military installations. The TMMC encourages your committee, with military and community participation, to identify new and enhanced strategies to replace the current structure with land/air use limitations or restrictions, regulatory strategies, or other tools to preserve military use areas inside or outside municipal boundaries.

Section 397A.001 Purpose

- Does not grant independent land use regulatory authority to cities and counties in the extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and unincorporated areas. Much of the encroachment concerns impacting military installations occur in a municipality's ETJ and unincorporated areas of a county where local governments lack the authority to plan, zone, regulate, or restrict development incompatible to military missions.

Section 397A.052 Creation of Regional Military Sustainability Commission

- Assumes that cities/counties have the authority and/or resources to fund and establish a Commission. Additional financial constraints placed on municipalities in Senate Bill 2 (86th Texas Legislature, 2019) make it unrealistic to take on currently unfunded mandates.
- Assumes that cities/counties would agree on all issues.
- Distance protections in the ETJ or unincorporated area may contradict the latest Joint Land Use Studies (JLUS). Senate Bill 6 (SB6—85th Texas Legislature, 1st Called Session, 2017) states that municipalities will be given “the authority to adopt and enforce an ordinance regulating the land use in the area in the manner recommended by the most recent joint land use study.”
- The five statute mile provision for military installations engaged in flight training is flawed as many airfields/runways are many miles inside bases.
- Statute expressly states that it shall be narrowly construed and grants no regulatory power over and above what is already in Chapter 245 LGC (Issuance of Local Permits), so there is no way to broadly interpret it to meet an overall purpose. Such limitations inhibit a municipality from the overall goal of protecting military installations.
- Regional Military Sustainability Commissions would be making recommendations to counties and cities for areas over which there is no authority for the cities and counties to act. Cities could act on recommendations for tracts that are within the city limits – but cities already have that authority. Counties remain powerless to enact recommendations due to existing statutory limitations.

Section 397A.053 Hearing on a Creation of Commission

- Existing language is overly broad. As an example, Joint Base San Antonio geographically touches 20 cities and four counties—all would have to agree to participate.
- The statute lacks clarity to identify which governmental entities are empowered to enforce a Commissions’ recommendations.
- The Commissions are an additional bureaucratic layer without any teeth to enact and enforce land use strategies, recommendations or regulations to protect vital military installations.

Section 397A.054

- Includes an arbitrary number of nine (9) members. In some parts of Texas, military installations are in rural areas where it might be difficult to fill such positions. This is an unwieldy number of commissioners.
- Lack of clarity on Commission leadership. Whose regulations, charter or by-laws would? There is a lack of clarity on authority and powers of participating entities.
- Resourcing the Commissions (funding, staff, and administrative expenses).

Section 397A.055 Commission Review of New Projects and Establishment of an Advisory Committee

- Advisory Committee appears to be an expensive and unnecessary duplication of existing municipal structures.
- Unclear what, if any, authority an Advisory Committee has that local governments and their various regulatory committees don't already have.
- 397A.055 (b) requires a 6 person advisory committee to make recommendations to the 9 member Commission. Again, this is not only unwieldy, but there are no resources allocated for either the Commission or the Committee.
- The Advisory Committee is required to be composed of three uniformed military or DoD members who would represent their respective installation. Under the DoD Joint Ethics Rule (JER), they could only be ex-officio members, meaning they could not vote. The remaining three voting members would represent landowners. Even if non-DoD members are selected to represent the military installation - which it is not clear if that is feasible, it is highly likely to guarantee a deadlock 3-3 vote. This is a serious flaw in the overall Commission structure.
- These actions already occur in municipalities' urban/land use planning departments along with the military, landowners, developers, and other stakeholders.
- New projects are guided by the most recent JLUS, depending on the installation, as directed in SB 6.
- In most communities the military and the municipalities are notified of any development requests near a military installation.
- City of San Antonio, for example, has several forums to communicate and discuss development threatening military missions.
- If an advisory committee disapproves a permit application, who enforces the disapproval? What if it conflicts with the latest JLUS or the authority of the municipality? This could pose drawn out and divisive battles over permitting.

Section 397A.056 Regional Compatible Development Standards

- Compatible development standards are already contained in adopted JLUSs. JLUSs could be strengthened by clarifying that they are more than simply guidance documents. They are, in fact, adopted and enforceable land use plans to be adhered to by developers, landowners, as well as state and local government and regulatory agencies, and guided in law by SB 6.
- Appears to create an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy.
- Communities are guided by SB 6 (latest JLUS).

Section 397A.057 Coordination with Other Plans/Studies

- Duplicates JLUSs, master planning, and other urban planning documents.

Section 397A.062 Judicial Review of Commission or Governmental Entity Decision

- There is no exhaustion of administrative remedies like other land use statutes. Appeals can be made directly on a Military Sustainability Commission recommendation instead of waiting until after a municipality acts on the Commission's recommendation. Moreover, the Commission does not grant regulatory authority to cities and counties in the ETJ/unincorporated areas—meaning cities and counties can't enforce many recommendations.
- This language encourages unnecessary litigation which will take away resources from military installations trying to protect their missions. The same applies to local governments.

Additional Notes

- Authority for Regional Military Sustainability Commissions has been in existence for over a decade; no municipality has implemented one.
- The Commission's governing statute lacks the necessary authority to protect military installations compared to existing authority under SB 6.
- Commission recommendations would be optional and not required to be followed by regulatory authority
- In San Antonio alone, Joint Base San Antonio encompasses four counties, four congressional districts, and 20 smaller cities/towns—all would have to agree to form a commission.
- The Commission's constricting distance authority limits installation protections, completely stifles military mission growth, and makes Commission recommendations insufficient and in direct conflict with the buffers cited in the detailed and community developed/approved JLUSs.
- JLUSs have been published/approved with community participation (military, landowners, businesses, neighborhood associations, cities, counties, other key stakeholders) and have been specifically tailored to ensure compatible land use for each individual bases' military missions, and encroachment challenges
- A number of municipalities looked at this authority to protect Camp Bullis, one of the largest training areas in the State of Texas, and at Randolph AFB, the U.S. Air Forces' Air Education and Training Command. The conclusion was that the Regional Military Sustainability Commissions would not protect either installation

U.S. Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth (NAS JRB Fort Worth) Regional Coordination Committee (RCC)

The Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base, Fort Worth (NAS JRB Fort Worth) Regional Coordination Committee (RCC) would like to respond to the House Committee on Defense and Veterans' Affairs notice of formal request for information.

The Regional Coordination Committee was formed out of a 2008 Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) surrounding the NAS JRB Fort Worth. The study results included a joint agreement by the cities

of Benbrook, Fort Worth, Lake Worth, River Oaks, Sansom Park, Westworth Village, White Settlement, and Tarrant County, to collectively move forward on recommendations that promote the viability of the NAS JRB Fort Worth and its economic significance to the surrounding communities.

We applaud the Committee for seeking information on important topics that affect Texas military installations and defense communities. The RCC encourages compatible land use planning, conducts community outreach, and participates in military affairs surrounding NAS JRB Fort Worth.

The RCC supports legislation that promotes compatible growth and provides cities and counties enhanced options to manage growth near military installations and within training areas. Specifically, the RCC seeks legislation which promotes compatible development and quality of life, as well as, minimizes encroachment through the following tools:

- Creating effective methods to initiate dialogue between project developers, military bases, and City, County, and State officials prior to development for proposed activities (e.g. wind turbines, communications towers, sensitive land uses, lighting, etc.) that may affect military operations;
- Adding military installations, training areas, and adjacent land to the list of restricted areas for UAS operation to create a safe environment that does not impede military operations;
- Supporting collaboration between local governments, state, and the Federal Aviation Administration to advance regulations to ensure safe operations of unmanned aircraft vehicles;
- Supporting continued funding for the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant program;
- Expanding real estate disclosure near military installation requirements to include new residential construction, residential leases, and commercial properties.

City of San Antonio Office of Military and Veteran Affairs

Their office requests the elimination of Section 397A from Local Government Code, Title 12.

It is the position of the office that Regional Military Sustainability Commissions (RMSC) have proven to be an ineffective tool in assisting Texas military installations and their host defense communities with protecting the missions, operations, readiness, and resiliency of military installations for the following reasons:

- The lack of utility of the current version of a Chapter 397A Commission is validated by the fact that it has never been implemented anywhere in the decade since it has been the law. This is largely due to the Chapter's inherent shortfalls and inability to adequately protect military installations.
- Chapter 397A was intended to provide mechanisms to reconcile a city's growth with the maintenance of an installation's mission(s), however, the statute provides no statutory "teeth" to enact and enforce land use strategies, recommendations, or regulations to

protect military installations.

- The intent of the RMSC has since been satisfied through subsequent legislative action, JLUS documents, and municipal regulations which meet or exceed Chapter 397A's purpose. For example:
 - Each DoD-sponsored JLUS (now, Regional Compatible Use Plans) is specifically tailored to ensure compatible land use for each individual installation's military missions and encroachment challenges.
 - LGC Section 397.005 and 397.006 define parameters through which defense communities must consult with or notify a military base or defense facility authorities with respect to development around a military installation.
 - Concerns with the RMSC's constrictive 2 mile boundary, which limits installation protection. The boundary is insufficient and in direct conflict with the 5-mile buffers cited in the detailed recommendations and community-approved JLUS and supported by SB 6 [85th Session].
- According to Texas' military leaders, current Joint Land Use Studies (JLUS) continue to be the best protection for Texas' military missions and installations.
- RMSCs do not protect Texas military installations and would become an unnecessary bureaucratic burden if implemented, risking the loss of military missions in Texas. An RMSC for Joint Base San Antonio would encompass four counties, four Congressional districts, and 20 smaller cities/communities – all would have to agree on any proposed recommendations.

The City of San Antonio Office of Military and Veteran Affairs closely coordinates with the senior military installation commanders in our state, the senior operational Air Force Commander, civic and business leaders, and the Texas cities, counties and municipalities that host military installations. Based on the concerns they have relayed to me, I ask you to eliminate Section 397A from Local Government Code, Title 12. This action will send a strong signal to the Department of Defense and the next set of BRAC scorers that the state of Texas continuously strives to support its military installations in the most effective and efficient manner.

Joint Base San Antonio Quick Facts

The growth in new missions and significant construction activities brought about by Base Realignment and Closure ("BRAC 2005") strengthened San Antonio's role as a leading military research, training, and education center. One of the major outcomes of BRAC 2005 was the creation of Joint Base San Antonio ("JBSA") which is the largest joint base in the DoD. The following fact sheet about JBSA is included for your awareness:

- Four installations cover 46,500 acres, and support over 80,000 personnel and 266 mission partners
- \$41B economic impact to Texas and \$13B to San Antonio; 634K in direct and indirect employment
- All base support functions, real property, and land for JBSA-Lackland, JBSA-Randolph, JBSA-Fort Sam Houston, and JBSA-Camp Bullis is under the 502nd Air Base Wing

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- Major mission partners across JBSA: U.S. Army North, U.S. Army South, HQ Air Education and Training Command, 16th Air Force, Army Medical Command, Army Mission and Installation Contracting Command, the Navy Medicine Education and Training Command, Army Installation Management Command, Air Force Installation and Mission Support Center
 - 138K+ personnel are trained at JBSA facilities every year
 - \$900M Military Construction (MILCON) underway – largest Air Force MILCON program
 - Military missions represent \$41B economic impact to the City of San Antonio
 - 2005 BRAC brought major medical realignment along with \$3.2B in MILCON and 12.5K jobs
 - Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) -- DoD's only Level 1 trauma center; 85% of trauma patients are non-DoD affiliated civilians treated under the DoD's Secretarial Designee program
 - BAMC is the nation's premier military training platform to prepare military healthcare professionals to provide life-saving combat medical care
 - BAMC provides support to 2.6M people across 22 counties/26M square miles in southwest Texas
 - All Air Force, Army, and Navy enlisted medical technicians are trained at JBSA-Fort Sam Houston
 - Medical training, special forces training and other combat operations training (day and night) is conducted at JBSA-Camp Bullis; from 2013 and 2016, approximately 550K personnel trained here
 - JBSA-Lackland hosts: Air Force's only Basic Military Training location for all enlisted Airmen; Air Force Security Forces school house; Inter-American Air Forces Academy
 - Adjacent and contiguous to JBSA-Lackland is Port San Antonio (formerly Kelly AFB) – “the Port”
 - The Air Force and the Port jointly utilize the runway for military and commercial airfield operations
 - The Air Force continues to lease over 30 buildings, which consist of 1.75M square feet of space
 - Largest Air Force leaseback is at Building 171, a 460K square foot facility; Air Force spent \$26.5M to renovate the building, which houses 11 missions
 - Approximately 7,000 DoD personnel work at Building 171 and other facilities at the Port
 - JBSA-Randolph houses the HQ Air Education and Training Command, Air Force Personnel Center, Air Force Recruiting Service, and 19th Air Force
 - JBSA-Randolph's primary operational mission is undergraduate pilot and instructor pilot training

Charge 4.

Examine gaps in services and assess efforts to connect justice-involved veterans, senior citizens, and homeless populations to services while incarcerated and after release at both the local and state levels. Specifically, the committee should evaluate training and technical assistance provided by the Texas Veterans Commission to criminal justice agencies. (Joint charge with the House Committee on Corrections)

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) works in collaboration with other state agencies and local resources to address the needs of veterans, senior citizens, and homeless populations incarcerated in TDCJ. The agency assists these populations by identifying existing needs, delivering services while incarcerated, and making appropriate referrals for community resources when released into society.

TDCJ-Involved Senior Needs

Inmates 55 years of age or older are considered elderly and experience a myriad of challenges that are not common to a younger incarcerated population, yet they are able to take advantage of the many program opportunities available to all inmates. The population of incarcerated individuals have aged at a faster pace than that of the general population, meaning inmates feel the effects of aging sooner than most people. The number of elderly inmates is rising and expected to trend higher. As of October 31, 2020, there are 19,248 inmates over the age of 55, a 51% increase since 2010. Aging presents additional reentry barriers such as medical conditions, medication access, appropriate housing, family reunification, and a source of income, to name a few.

Seniors - While Incarcerated

While incarcerated, TDCJ inmates live in the general population as long as they are independently able to perform the activities of daily living and keep up with the unit's schedule. Specialized housing is needed for those geriatric inmates who cannot live in the general population.

Inmates who begin to show signs of infirmity due to age, and cannot function well in general population, but do not need help with their activities of daily living can be moved into "sheltered housing". To help support the growing population of elderly inmates, TDCJ and the Correctional Managed Health Care Committee, with funding support provided through the Legislature, have created additional "sheltered housing" beds at various units. These "sheltered housing" beds for geriatric inmates allow for medical treatment including intermittent long-term oxygen therapy.

Some aging inmates move to a geriatric facility where inmates need operational and physical accommodations. Geriatric units provide ambulatory and outpatient medical services, supported by a telemedicine program and health care staff. Seniors who require geriatric care, consistent with assisted living or nursing home level care in the community, are placed in the medically appropriate level of care that meets their daily needs addressing medication, medical services, and dietary provisions.

Attending to a senior citizen's medical needs are necessary but providing multidimensional opportunities for development are important as well. Seniors are offered programmatic opportunities such as faith-based dorms, life skills programs, education, substance abuse treatment, sex offender treatment, cognitive intervention, and post-secondary education programming. In addition, there are Reading Acceleration Programs (literacy programming) offered through the Chaplaincy Department, Peer Support Services, and specialized Peer-to-Peer support for those

who need Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodations. Additionally, volunteers provide pet therapy programs on designated geriatric units.

Seniors – Reentering Society

In preparation to reenter society, case planning is initiated by TDCJ for the geriatric inmate. This process begins months prior to release.

The assigned case manager will evaluate post-release needs of the inmate to ensure continuity of care. This evaluation will be informed by the inmate and his/her medical care providers to identify medical and mental health needs. Family members, if available, may also be engaged in the pre-release planning process to address the senior inmate's unique circumstance.

Trained TDCJ reentry staff assist this geriatric population to apply for, or restart, Social Security and Medicare entitlements. After being released with a 30-day supply of prescribed medications, with entitlement coverage in place, the geriatric inmate will be able to access medical services and needed medications in the post-release environment.

While the ability to reside with family is optimal, in some instances it is not possible due to physical limitations, medical needs, or lack of family resources. The agency works to identify appropriate housing that will meet the needs of the geriatric inmate. For more able-bodied senior citizens, case managers work to locate a senior residence using the agency's resource guide and knowledge of local housing availability. However, in some cases, the inmate may need to be placed in a skilled nursing facility. In that event, TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division (RID) staff will coordinate with TDCJ's Texas Correctional Office on Medical or Mental Impairments (TCOOMMI) to secure placement in an appropriate facility.

For senior inmates already released to supervision, TDCJ Parole Division (PD) staff coordinate with TCOOMMI on medical resources and skilled nursing placements. TDCJ RID case managers are also available to assist senior clients with referrals if any need emerges since reentering society.

For those senior inmates who have a terminal illness or require long term care, but due to time remaining on their sentence are not scheduled for standard release, the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BPP) may approve an early release through the Medically Recommended Intensive Supervision (MRIS) program. The program provides for continuity of care and post-release case monitoring and coordination.

TDCJ-Involved Homeless Needs

Individuals who have experienced homelessness and are incarcerated within TDCJ may face challenges upon release including employment, housing, medical, and other issues. During incarceration, TDCJ provides effective, evidence-based and evidence informed treatment and programmatic services for individual inmates. Upon supervised release, individuals are provided with opportunities to access resources and programmatic support. These opportunities help facilitate positive change in the lives of inmates, help them reenter society, and help the individual overcome obstacles that lead to homelessness.

Homeless - While Incarcerated

Upon arrival to TDCJ or when assigned to a new unit, inmates are administered various tests to detect medical or mental health problems and to determine educational and intelligence levels by treatment professionals. These assessments help to create an inmate's Individualized Treatment Plan (ITP). If self-identified, the counselor will consider homelessness when creating the plan.

The ITP serves as the programmatic plan during an inmate's incarceration. The plan outlines programmatic activities and services for an inmate and prioritizes their participation in recommended programs based on the individual's needs, program availability and applicable parole or discharge date. While TDCJ treatment programs and access to health care resources are not solely for inmates who have experienced homelessness, these opportunities will benefit the inmate and prepare him or her for a successful integration into society.

The ITP has a goal of reducing recidivism, removing barriers to reentry, and addressing the needs of the inmate to be successful, like addressing obstacles for a stable home. Opportunities include:

- Education
- Post-Secondary Education
- Vocational
- Mock Interviews
- Life Skills
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- State Jail Substance Abuse
- Sex Offender Treatment
- On-the-Job Training Certificates
- Faith-Based Dorms
- Cognitive Intervention
- Resume Writing

With employment being a key component to address homelessness, basic and vocational education opportunities are available through the Windham School District, along with on-the-job training opportunities to enhance the skills and learned during the educational courses. Inmates are also able to earn industrial certifications to further employability.

As the inmate begins to work toward the reentry planning phase, these programmatic components are incorporated into the case plan and aid in reducing the risk of homelessness upon release.

Homeless – Reentering Society

TDCJ does not release an inmate to parole without a verified home plan. Any inmate releasing to supervision who does not have an approved residence plan upon release will be placed by the TDCJ Parole Division (PD) in a residential reentry center, also known as a halfway house. TDCJ Reentry and Integration (RID) staff are available to assist an inmate with finding a more suitable

residence. TDCJ compiles and maintains the Reentry Resource Guide with housing options included. It is available to inmates in hard copy at multiple locations on each prison unit and on the agency's webpage for post-release access. TDCJ RID staff are accessible for one-on-one review and assistance with housing.

TDCJ recognizes that a state identification card, as well as a birth certificate and a social security card, helps an individual combat homelessness, obtain employment, and secure a residence. TDCJ works to ensure an inmate has identification documents at the time of release. TDCJ RID case managers screen and process documentation needs for all eligible inmates prior to release.

In addition to identification documents, upon release TDCJ inmates receive resumes outlining work service completed while incarcerated, including any educational achievements earned, as well as copies of vocational or other job training certificates. For those inmates with specific vocational skills, the inmate's information is uploaded to the TDCJ Website for Work web portal for potential employers to review and, if interested, offer employment.

TDCJ RID staff focus on employment as a significant element of a successful transition to the community and provide employment assistance both before and after release. To capitalize on education and job and skills training received while in custody, TDCJ offers career expositions, employment preparation classes (to include soft skills training), and job fairs on a consistent basis to enhance the inmate's employability and obtainment of employment, often working in conjunction with the Texas Workforce Commission. By securing employment, the risk of losing a residence is reduced, thereby providing a more stable environment for the inmate to finish their sentence or reintegrate in the community.

To further enhance strategies to address homelessness for those in the criminal justice system, the TDCJ participates in on-going collaborative workgroups and meetings with other agencies and entities to identify proven and emerging resources for those who have experienced homelessness.

TDCJ-Involved Veteran Needs

TDCJ is responsible for the identification of an inmate's veteran status and the coordination of activities on behalf of veteran inmates and veterans released to parole supervision. The TDCJ RID collaborates with multiple veteran organizations regarding reentry services. Each partner veteran organization's expertise enhances the individualized services TDCJ provides to the veteran population.

Veterans – While Incarcerated

The TDCJ works to identify veterans at the point of incarceration by verifying all inmates through the Veterans Affairs Veteran's Reentry Search Service (VRSS). Upon verification, all veterans are provided with an agency brochure and incarcerated veterans literature outlining available services while incarcerated and beyond.

Those services include:

- applying for the DD-214,

-
- compensation and pension, and
 - information on education benefits such as the Hazlewood Act

In coordination with the TDCJ Veterans Coordinator, case managers assist veterans with completing veteran forms and mailing them, at no cost, to the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) for review and then processing by the U.S. Veterans Administration (VA).

Veterans who have established benefits or are awarded benefits while incarcerated are eligible to receive up to 10% of their benefits directly to their TDCJ commissary accounts. Additionally, staff assist eligible family members in applying for apportionment to receive up to 90% of the veteran's benefits while the veteran is incarcerated.

TDCJ welcomes 55 volunteer-run veteran programs on units statewide. On Veteran's Day, Memorial Day, and Armed Services birthdays there are special events at units for veterans provided by volunteer organizations. In addition to these programs, TDCJ coordinates with the TVC and the Samaritan Center to facilitate a Veteran Reentry Dorm for state jail inmates.

Veterans are housed in a peer support living environment. Incarcerated veterans may participate in TDCJ provided substance abuse treatment, faith-based programming, cognitive intervention, educational, vocational, certification, and on- the-job training programs. Veterans also participate in the process of mock interviews and resume writing. Through employment initiatives with second chance employers and veteran specific hiring strategies, the agency has increased the likelihood for incarcerated veterans to secure employment prior to release.

TDCJ is opening an in prison non-parole voted treatment program with peer housing dedicated to veterans and will soon be opening more peer housing to facilitate enhanced programming models of care for this specialized population.

Veterans – Reentering Society

In preparation for release, TDCJ coordinates with the TVC to initiate first time and reinstatement applications for VA benefits and health care which are then reviewed by TVC staff and submitted for processing. By initiating the inmate's veteran benefits application prior to release, the veteran can more quickly utilize these benefits post- release, upon approval.

To further assist the inmate in the veteran benefits application process, the agency has allowed contracted medical providers to conduct the VA required Compensation & Pension exams at the veteran's unit of assignment. If the process was initiated while the veteran was incarcerated, but incomplete prior to release, the agency will assist in coordinating the exams post-release.

TDCJ coordinates with the VA's Health Care for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) program which links the veteran inmate with HCRV providers.

Through the program, the inmate can access services such as:

- outreach and pre-release assessments,
- referrals to medical, mental health, and social services,

-
- post-release employment services,
 - short-term case management assistance, and
 - veteran housing opportunities

Additionally, TDCJ staff will provide the veteran with resources such as military veteran peer support and continuity of care services.

As a supplement to the identification documents provided to all eligible releasing inmates, TDCJ RID staff provide the returning veteran with their DD-214 at the time of release.

El Paso County's Community Services Department

El Paso County's Community Services Department operates a reentry support services program intended to assist individuals transitioning from incarceration back into the community to become self-supporting, productive citizens, thereby also reducing recidivism and improving public safety. Based on our reentry team's experience working with justice-involved veterans, senior citizens and homeless populations, some of the barriers these individuals face include lack of supportive housing, need for transportation to services they qualify for, need for mental health and/or substance use treatment, and assistance with obtaining basic documentation.

El Paso's own recidivism research has shown that even a few days in jail can have a significant negative impact on recidivism, and that the longer these people stay in jail, the more likely they are to return. This further supports the urgent need for targeted and strategic re-entry services. County-level intervention is critical for previously-incarcerated people as they navigate the legal system. Resources provided to these individuals by counties could assist in deterring these individuals from committing further crime. Unfortunately, however, step-down or transitional programs to assist previously-incarcerated people transition back into the community are rare at the county level.

Regarding need for assistance with obtaining basic documentation, state identification processes for individuals releasing from prison are not honored at the county level, leaving many justice-involved individuals releasing from county jails without a valid form of identification they need to secure housing, employment and other necessary resources. Take for instance one of our reentry team's clients who is 87 years old, states that he is a Korean War veteran, and is homeless. He had no identification, and although he has many stories about his experience in the Korean War, his paperwork is untraceable. It has been difficult to connect with the proper channels to verify his veteran status, and thus connect him with services he qualifies for. This client's story is not unique. In its Oct. 1, 2020 report, the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services' Criminal Justice Workgroup¹ identified access to veterans' status for justice-involved veterans as an unmet veteran need statewide. They recommend better communication amongst state agencies to provide veterans information to county jails for the purposes of continuity of care and veterans benefits.

The Workgroup also spoke to incarcerated veterans' need for mental health, substance use, and peer support programming while in jail and upon release, and recommended increased collaboration amongst state agencies and local providers to support veterans in county jails. We believe such supports, regardless of veteran status, would help formerly-incarcerated individuals be more

successful with reentry. We recommend the Committee review the Workgroup's findings and recommendations in full.

We also refer the Committee to a veteran needs assessment, released this year and commissioned by the County and City of El Paso, El Paso Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders, which speaks to several challenges faced by former service members in our region, including evidence of need for greater services to justice-involved veterans.² The County, its veterans advisory board, and area partners are working to identify solutions and best practices to address the issues raised in the needs assessment so that we can make El Paso the greatest community in Texas for military veterans and their families.

In sum, training and assistance provided by the state to criminal justice agencies, including county governments providing services to previously-incarcerated individuals, should be strengthened to achieve better results for these individuals both pre- and post-release.

Charge 5.

Review the connection between the economic vitality of business and industry and the economic vitality of our military veterans transitioning into the workforce. Specifically, the committee should analyze barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life, the effectiveness of government transition and training benefits, and current and ongoing demand for veteran and military spouse employment from industry in Texas. (Joint charge with the House Committee on International Relations & Economic Development)

City of San Antonio Office of Military and Veteran Affairs

The City of San Antonio Office of Military and Veteran Affairs fully supports a comprehensive study to analyze the components described above in Interim Charge #5. We ask that the scope of the analysis include veterans who have already transitioned from military service and continue to struggle to secure meaningful post-military employment, as well as employment training benefits (to include fellowships and internships) for veterans and military and/or veteran spouses. We also believe another component to consider is supportive messaging that dispels common myths among employers with respect to military members, veterans, and military/veteran spouses.

The economic impact of the military on the State of Texas is significant. To underscore the importance of veterans and military-affiliated spouses to the Texas economy, please consider this entry from the 2019 Military Snapshot (attached to this letter) published by the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts:

Texas military installations play a vital role in our strategic national defense and provide significant benefits to the entire state economy. In many cases, these bases are the lifeblood of their communities, supporting local businesses and spurring home sales. But their economic impact reaches throughout the state, creating jobs in a wide variety of industries. Military bases in Texas support more than 226,000 direct jobs and \$75.3 billion to Texas' gross domestic product annually. They support an estimated 634,000 Texas workers in some capacity, contributing at least \$39.2 billion in disposable personal income for our citizens. By detailing the economic impact of the 14 U.S. military installations in Texas, we hope to emphasize their importance to strong, diverse and growing regional economies.

Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), one of 15 bases hosted by the state of Texas, provides \$41.3 billion in economic impact/output to the state – this is one-third of the total military impact/output of \$123.7 billion to the Texas economy. San Antonio's is home to approximately 1.6 million people, which includes just slightly over 500,000 veterans, retirees, and military-affiliated dependents.

The City of San Antonio (CoSA) and its military community have been steadfast supporters of programs focused on military members transitioning to civilian life, employment for veterans/retirees, and military-affiliated spouses. In 2019, CoSA formalized a partnership with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's Hiring Our Heroes (HOH) initiative to establish the Military Spouse Fellowship Program (MSFP). The San Antonio City Council unanimously voted to fund up to 40 Fellows over a 2-year 09 November 2020 period; the MSFP launched in September 2019. The program has attracted 12 host companies with another 44 who are now in the pool of host companies. Additionally, the initial success of CoSA's sponsorship attracted corporate sponsors to the San Antonio MSFP.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation's HOH program also operates a very successful Corporate Fellowship in San Antonio that aids military members' transition to civilian life. In just 3 years of existence in San Antonio, this Fellowship boasts 71 host companies. Each year has seen increases in the number of Fellows completing the program, with a total of 200 since the Fellowship began in 2018. Key success indicators are an 88% post-Fellowship placement rate and

an average salary of \$91K. Unique to this Fellowship is the attractiveness of San Antonio -- half of all applicants participate in San Antonio come here in Permissive TDY status, and all but a few stayed in San Antonio at the completion of their Fellowship.

We believe this analysis should include a review of the Bexar County Military and Veterans Services Center (BCMVSC). The four counties that surround JBSA all have veteran service officers, but Bexar County has created “The Veteran Cycle” model, that is gaining national attention. In November 2018, Bexar County integrated existing veteran support functions and added new services to create the Bexar County Military and Veterans Services Center (BCMVSC), that serves transitioning military and the 270K veterans in the San Antonio with a \$1.2M total budget (FY20). This model supports military members during their transition from active duty, and informs them regarding non-employment benefits, employment readiness and career employment.

City of El Paso

El Paso, as a military community and home to Fort Bliss, supports the effort of the Committee to address the needs of veterans as they transition from military service to civilian life. The City provides the following information concerning the interim charge.

The City’s human resources department had identified some barriers to military veterans transitioning from active duty to civilian life and workforce. The military has more than 7,000 jobs across more than 100 functional areas which many have a direct civilian-job equivalent. Through their military service, transitioning service members have gained subject matter expertise, years of on-the-job training and advanced skills in such fields as information technology, transportation logistics, supply-chain management, public relations, medical, security and safety operations, management level leadership skills that translate to careers and jobs within the civilian workforce. In fact, veterans acquire what human resource refers to as intangible skills that are productive and highly source after skills in the civilian workforce such as leadership and teamwork, mission drive, problem-solving, and decision making skills, ability to adapt quickly to unexpected situations, high standards in ethics, safety and security, and the ability to work with large, diverse groups of people. However, because these intangible skills are hard to define and difficult to translate into civilian employment forms, this creates a language barrier.

The civilian employers’ (public and private) perception of veterans’ skills and abilities is one of the biggest barriers to veteran hiring. It is critical that human resource professionals and hiring officials understand military skill sets and how these skills translate to the industry to ensure that this talent pool is tapped into for employment opportunities.

Recommendations from the City of El Paso

- (1) Improve or create programs within the organization that provide cultural sensitivity training or awareness for employees that will be interacting and working with veterans. These programs should provide for a better understanding of specific issues and difficulties that veterans, who are transitioning into the civilian workforce, may have and the differences of working with civilians as opposed to

military soldiers.

- (2) Allocate recruitment resources strategically by tracking job fairs and other recruitment efforts that target transitioning veterans and spouses. Attending job fairs is important, but also providing internal human resource services to this group where they can obtain information on application and hiring procedures, job opportunities that align with their experience and education and best fit their career goals. Provide resources on creating resumes that apply to civilian jobs, and provide education sessions/resources to improve or develop their interviewing skills to adapt to the civilian “job” interview.
- (3) Take advantage of federal resource to connect with and train veterans early in the transition process as well as creating partnerships with established community based programs or centers that help connect military job seekers and employers such as the Texas Workforce Commission and military spouse employment programs.
- (4) Invest resources in onboarding, career development and retention once the veteran is hired to ensure that the organization gets their return on investment – not just focus on recruitment.
- (5) Track veteran recruitment, performance, and retention metrics to gain a deeper understanding of which strategies are most effective and which offer the greatest return on investment.
- (6) Incorporate small businesses into, or create a connection between small business and the Department of Defense supply chain. Not only is it good business from an economic development standpoint, but it also helps our veterans transition into the civilian sector because veterans tend to look for government or defense industry field for employment after their separation from service.

El Paso County

The County of El Paso is fortunate to be the home of the 1st Armored Division, Fort Bliss, housing over 30,000 active duty service members and over 100,000 family members. In the last decade, several nonprofit organizations and municipalities have taken aggressive steps to provide services aimed at improving quality of life, access to education, spousal employment opportunities and increasing the retention rate of transitioning service members by attracting and retaining quality employment. Transitioning service members have proven to be critical assets in the civilian workforce as they provide a unique set of skills and leadership.

However, in order to fully capitalize on those sets of skills, it is important to continue providing programs for continuing education like the Hazlewood Act, which provides qualified veterans (and spouses and dependent children) with up to 150 hours of tuition exemption at Texas colleges and universities, and exploring the implementation of a state sponsored program like the U.S. Army Partnership for Youth Success (PaYS) program, which connects military members with public and

private sector employers.

Launching a state version of the PaYS program would allow the Army to create partnerships with a cross section of private industry, academia, businesses and state and local public institutions, urging partners to sign an agreement to provide job interviews and potential employment to separating soldiers. The incentive for these kinds of partnerships is that the government entity covers any and all training expenses through grants, resulting in substantial savings for employers.

In addition to providing incentives to employers, the state of Texas must continue supporting the aggressive steps taken in easing the regulatory process for transferring out-of-state certifications for military spouses. As the state continues to support military spouse certifications, it is important to include transferring service members and make sure that higher education entities provide programs for transferable certifications. Providing access to post-secondary education, creating additional incentive programs for employers and providing regulatory flexibility for out-of-state certifications will ensure that the state of Texas continues to tear down the barriers faced by veterans, transitioning service members and spouses.

Finally, we refer the Committee to a veteran needs assessment, released this year and commissioned by the County and City of El Paso, El Paso Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders, which speaks to several economic barriers and challenges faced by transitioning service members in our region. The County, its veterans advisory board, and area partners are working to identify solutions and best practices to address the issues raised in the needs assessment so that we can make El Paso the greatest community in Texas for military veterans and their families. The needs assessment may be found at <https://bit.ly/32KcimD>.

Private Stakeholder Responses to Charge 5

Texas Association of Manufacturers

The Texas Association of Manufacturers (TAM) represents over 600 manufacturing companies in Texas, including 70 of the state's largest industry employers. Manufacturing is a core element of the Texas economy, directly employing over 869,000 workers who earn an average compensation of more than \$82,500 annually. Moreover, a typical manufacturing job supports 3.8 additional jobs in our state, with some industry sectors, such as petrochemical - which uses Texas oil and gas - providing even higher related job multiples. Viewed in this manner, manufacturing accounts for about 30% of our state's overall employment.

TAM membership includes companies representing almost two dozen industry sectors. One of our state's most important industry sectors is Texas' aerospace, aviation and defense manufacturing industries. TAM is fortunate to have a large number of these companies as members, which are organized as one of TAM's many industry sector groups and known as the Texas Defense, Aerospace and Aviation Alliance (TDAAA).

I believe that the members of both committees can appreciate the ongoing importance of this industry sector as one of the best "landing" opportunities for military veterans returning into the workforce. This industry sector is very important in that regard since veterans are often a great fit

for aerospace and defense careers. So, keeping this sector competitive to grow more jobs for Texas veterans is critical.

During the 86th Texas Legislature, legislators created a new law that aligns state franchise tax policy with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), boosting Texas' competitive stance in attracting and retaining major defense-related aerospace projects. Prior to the passage of HB 1607 by Representative Craig Goldman and Senator Larry Taylor, Texas was the only state that did not allow for a tax deduction for servicing expenses on aerospace/defense manufactured goods. The new law allows Texas to compete with all other states for good, high-paying jobs in this vital industry sector.

Texas has a proud heritage of supporting our military men and women who daily risk their lives to serve our country. Our aerospace and defense industry manufacturers would tell you that they are honored to provide them with the most advanced tools and products that give them the best advantage possible to prevail in any challenge. The companies of the Texas Defense Aerospace and Aviation Alliance and TAM are proud that many of these products are "Texas Made." We are grateful for the attention of the Texas Legislature to this industry sector, and for helping Texas continue to grow this industry, for the sake of our veterans and all Texas workers.

The Boeing Company

Boeing is the world's largest aerospace company and leading manufacturer of commercial jetliners, defense, space and security systems, and service provider of aftermarket support. As America's largest manufacturing exporter, the company supports airlines and U.S. and allied government customers in more than 150 countries. Boeing products and tailored services include commercial and military aircraft, satellites, weapons, electronic and defense systems, launch systems, advanced information and communication systems, and performance-based logistics and training.

With a rich legacy and history in Texas, The Boeing Company proudly employs more than 4,700 Texans throughout the state, supporting defense and commercial customers in space exploration, distribution, cutting edge technologies, and aircraft maintenance and upgrades. In 2019, we spent over \$1.7 billion with nearly 600 suppliers and vendors across Texas. Boeing's business supports an estimated 39,000 direct and indirect jobs in Texas and with nearly 9,000 Boeing retirees in the state.

Our operations in Texas reach across communities and stretch across all major business units within Boeing. Across the state, this includes a large portfolio of Department of Defense business.

In Houston, Boeing is the leading provider of human spaceflight and space exploration systems, supporting space programs, including International Space Station, Starliner crew capsule, and Space Launch System, which will one day take humans to Mars.

In San Antonio, Boeing operates one of the largest military aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities in the world, carrying on a rich military aviation legacy following the closure of Kelly AFB.

In San Antonio, Boeing operates one of the largest military aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul facilities in the world, carrying on a rich military aviation legacy following the closure of Kelly AFB.

And, in 2017, our commitment to Texas grew with the opening of the headquarters of our newest global business unit, Boeing Global Services, in Plano, TX, a division leading over 22,000 employees in over 70 countries worldwide.

Boeing: Veterans Make Us Better

Boeing is an example of the great partnerships between the industry, our military, and our communities. We are proud to employ a diverse, talented and innovative workforce of more than 140,000 people worldwide, and particularly relevant to this charge is that military Veterans make up nearly 15% of that workforce.

From our hiring and employment programs to our grants and volunteer activities, it is our mission to help Veterans and their families' transition successfully into civilian life.

Employing veterans has been a priority for Boeing across the nation, as Veterans' experience and dedication are strong complements to the amazing things we do. In 2016, Boeing participated in the Joining Forces event at the White House, along with other industry representatives from the aerospace and defense sectors, pledging together to hire 30,000 veterans over a five year period. As a show of this commitment, since 2011, Boeing has hired more than 11,500 veterans within our teams.

Notably in recent past, Boeing granted a \$5 million, multi-year donation to help expand the United Service Organizations (USO) Pathfinder program—the nation's first comprehensive employment readiness program for transitioning military service members. Boeing's contribution went to support more than 210,000 transitioning service members during a three-year investment period. This expansion enabled the USO to reach nearly 80 percent of all active duty transitions annually.

In 2018, the company awarded \$10 million to the George W. Bush Institute's Military Service Initiative in support of veterans' programs and services. The company's donation was part of a \$30 million, multi-year investment aimed at veterans' recovery and rehabilitation programs and military transition services.

In 2019, we contributed more than \$12 million to support military and veteran organizations and efforts. These investments build on a 3-year \$25 million commitment to increase veterans giving, and target workforce transition services along with wounded warrior recovery and rehabilitation programs for veteran communities and their families.

Boeing Texas Vet Hiring and Community Support

Boeing extends these investments in veterans across Texas as well, supporting local organizations that focus on skill development and training for workforce transition; recovery and rehabilitation; and employee volunteerism in veteran specific communities.

This year, Boeing gave \$400,000 in grants to veteran organizations across Texas and \$150,000 in sponsorships to veteran causes.

Organizations including Corporate America Supports You, Grace After Fire, The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio STRONGSTAR PTSD Training Initiative, Adaptive Training Foundation, AirPower Foundation, and NPower were among the many beneficiaries providing transformational assistance to our military veterans right here in Texas.

Boeing's charitable investments are complemented by employee volunteers across Texas who support our heroes in the communities where they live and work. This includes personal investments of time, and talent, of nearly 10,000 hours annually.

As you can see, there is a trend here. We make it our mission to serve our military from Deployment to Employment. Not only do we deliver the most affordable, innovative and agile equipment, capability and services to our nation's military, we are committed to making sure that our armed forces continue to have the advantage after their service is done.

San Antonio Veteran Workforce

Texas has the Nation's 2nd largest population of military veterans, and their impact to the state's future workforce is recognizable. To take a closer look at that, our San Antonio business can serve as a microcosm. Part of the company's Global Services business, Boeing San Antonio maintains and modifies military and commercial aircraft including C-17 Globemaster III; U.S. Executive Fleet; and the F/A-18 Super Hornet. It is currently the largest such MRO facility within Boeing Global Services.

Having established operations in 1998 shortly after the Base Realignment and Closure of Kelly AFB, Boeing hired many military Veterans to fill jobs that were lost with the base closure. Veterans brought the skill and leadership needed, a familiarity with product, and a true sense of mission. This trend has continued for over 20 years, with Veterans and military experience being a sought after qualification for many high wage and highly innovative jobs across the industry.

Boeing has attempted to ease this transition and strengthen the connection between our Veterans and job opportunities. Establishing a Military Skills Translator program to help align skill codes in the military with skill codes in the industry. Creating direct connections with transition programs such as the USO and Military Service Organizations located in our communities, ensuring they are being fed real time job opportunities. Hosting Military Spouse Empowerment events to help participants understand how the skills they use to support their families are valued in the civilian workplace. The establishment of 33 employee- led Boeing Veteran Engagement Team Chapters, ready to assist transitioning Veterans from their own experience, whether making the transition to Boeing or not.

Boeing's focus on easing the transition of this valued workforce has resulted in military veterans now comprising over 40 percent of our San Antonio workforce, and Boeing becoming the largest Aerospace company in the region.

Across the state, military veterans now account for roughly 20% of our Texas workforce, further highlighting the value they bring to this industry, and the economic impact they present to our state.

Veterans impact goes beyond our workforce as well. In 2019, Boeing spent over \$450 million on products and services with veteran-owned businesses, many of which are located in Texas.

The values that our transitioning military members bring to our communities and our industries is great. As Boeing and other aerospace and defense companies in the state seek to expand operations and continue to innovate, Texas can be a leader for the rest of the nation in employing, servicing and transitioning its veterans into civilian life, and in the process attracting major industry growth.

With the 2nd largest population of military veterans and the 3rd largest population of active duty and reserves, Texas cannot overlook the sizable impact of military veterans on our economy. Creating more seamless transitions, providing wrap around services, and strengthening the connections between the health of business and industry and the health of our transitioning veterans is a recipe for economic growth for all stakeholders.

And as we've seen, as companies grow, so too will the employment opportunities, grants, and services they provide for our Veterans across Texas. Boeing stands ready to work with the legislature to help minimize the burden of transition for our Veterans, leading to more job opportunities for them, and an economic advantage for the State and the companies that call Texas home.

Combined Arms

Service members encounter a series of needs as they transition out of the military. These include securing employment and housing, addressing physical or mental health issues, and adjusting to civilian culture. The ease through which this transition is made has a profound impact on post-service well-being (Castro, 2013). Two studies on veteran transition and reintegration produced similar findings that highlighted several important social problems: veterans were unprepared for transition, singular organizations or agencies cannot meet the needs of veterans by themselves, the social services landscape is highly fragmented, and data is not consistent or shared across organizations (Tristate Veterans Community Alliance Report, 2014). Combined Arms was designed specifically to combat these social problems at the community-level through its centralized co-working space, collaborative work with member organizations, integrated Salesforce-based technology platform, and community leader program design.

Additionally, Combined Arms has developed and implemented an innovative awareness campaign that attracts military families to Texas, stimulating economic development and ensuring our 100+ member organizations are able to connect them to the 500+ resources available further upstream in the transition process before they leave active duty. This saves time, resources, and ensures a faster and more successful reintegration in most cases.

Government transition programs are important tools for service members as they leave the military. However, training these service members about the many community-based organizations available to them once they transition out of the military, may be overlooked. A

holistic approach for veterans and their families is vital to ensuring each individual's success. Combined Arms has partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission's Texas Veteran Leadership Program Veteran Resource and Referral Specialists to compliment their career services and provide other resources as needed for the veteran. Additionally, when a transitioning service member, veteran, or family member takes an assessment for services online (TexasVeterans.Network), the client is only referred to the organization they qualify for. This helps cut through the noise and confusion that many military families feel when they have to independently sift through the numerous resources available to them. Combined Arms, on the other hand, gives the client peace of mind when they are guaranteed a referral to a best-in-class organization. This is because Combined Arms has vetted each member organization through a due diligence process created for them by KPMG. Furthermore, each organization is held accountable to a 96-hour maximum response time once a client is connected to them, ensuring no veteran is left behind or falls through the cracks.

Across all requests, career services is by far the number one requested service among Combined Arms' clients. When transitioning to civilian life, servicemembers must translate their military experience into civilian terms in order to showcase their ability to perform essential job functions. Many veterans report this "translation" as a significant barrier to employment (Prudential, 2012). At Combined Arms, we have 20+ organizations solving this problem daily, and connecting the transitioning service member, veteran, or family member to additional resources available to them. Among the community based organizations and state/federal agencies offering career services in our platform, the specific resources include: resume writing, interview preparation, career search and placement, entrepreneurship, career mentoring, professional attire, LinkedIn assistance, internship opportunities, transition workshops, professional networking and development, and second chance job placement. Another vital aspect of career placement includes private sector relationships with corporations willing and able to place veterans and military spouses into meaningful careers. Veteran and military spouse hiring initiatives are impactful for both the employee and employer when corporate partners recognize the unparalleled loyalty, experience, and leadership abilities seen in veteran employees. Combined Arms is diligent in partnering only with employment organizations/agencies that place veterans into careers with a livable wage. During the assessment portion, clients are asked to note if they have a spouse and how many children under the age of 18 are living in their home. This information helps place the client in a career that will keep them well above the poverty line. In 2019 alone, our member organizations placed 1,000+ veterans into careers with a median starting salary of \$60,050, and 15 military spouses into careers with a median starting salary of \$51,770.

Additionally, the Texas Veterans Network was established by the Texas Workforce Commission in 2020 in order to collectively achieve Governor Abbott's vision to make Texas the first interconnected state for veterans and families in the United States. In order to achieve this vision, Combined Arms was selected to launch the Texas Veterans Network to help connect military, veterans, and their families to the federal, state, and local government agencies plus the litany of community-based nonprofit organizations providing services. The objective is to not only ensure the clients have faster, more effective access to employment services but to also reduce confusion in the selection of resources and reduce the redundancy and fragmentation among the veteran-serving agencies by holding them accountable.

When paired with the Texas Veterans Commission and Texas Workforce Commission, the Texas Veterans Network has the potential to dramatically increase access to employment services in the State of Texas for military, veterans, and their families. All of these employment programs can be accessed through the dynamic, ever-evolving Combined Arms system (Texas Veterans Network).

In conclusion, it is clear that veteran and military spouse employment is key to the economic development of the State of Texas. Currently, Texas is second only to California in the number of veteran residents with the states expecting to switch places in the coming years. As more veterans decide to call Texas home (or choose to stay here), it is imperative that our resources and services become more easily accessible and available to make the transition to civilian life easier and more efficient. Combined Arms' recommendation for the Committee is to help ensure the state agencies that serve veterans and families are not only aware of incredible resources like the Texas Veterans Network but also actively incentivizing their employees to refer clients into the Combined Arms system (Texas Veterans Network).

Charge 6.

Monitor the State Auditor's review of agencies and programs under the Committee's jurisdiction. The Chair shall seek input and periodic briefings on completed audits for the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years and bring forth pertinent issues for full committee consideration.

San Antonio Chamber of Commerce

The San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, Military Affairs and Leadership Development recommends amendments to §162.005 of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.

Summary of Additions

1. Requires the establishment of a state council with coordination and support from the Texas Education Agency, Texas Military Preparedness Commission, and Texas Commanders Council.
2. In addition to MIC3 requirements, the State Council must include one representative from each of the following: Texas Military Preparedness Commission, a military representative from the Texas Commanders Council, and a military representative from each service branch maintaining an installation in Texas.
3. Duties and functions of the State Council include: quarterly meetings with reporting requirements, establishment of charter and by-laws, administration, and management of the State's participation in the compact.

Texas Education Agency

The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (Military Compact) exists to strengthen transitions and close educational gaps as military families and their children move to a new school district in another state. Texas has been a member of the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) since 2009. As of 2014, all 50 states, including the District of Columbia, have joined the Military Compact.

The Military Compact applies to Active-Duty Service Members, National Guard, Reserve, Veterans medically discharged or retired for one year, and members who die on active duty.

To perform the duties and functions of the state council, two primary Texas Education Agency staff members undertake work in support of the Compact. Chiefly, TEA's military family liaison is responsible for establishing and maintaining relationships with staff at military installations throughout the state, providing outreach and technical assistance to military families and school districts, and developing resources and communication to support the needs of military-connected families. Additionally, the commissioner's designee to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Compact provisions, assisting families and school districts with inquiries and requests for assistance related to the Compact, coordinating communication with the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission and state commissioners, and providing guidance and support regarding state law and rule related to the Compact and military-connected students.

Together with other staff from a variety of offices across the Texas Education Agency, the Compact commissioner designee and the military family liaison oversee implementation of state laws and administrative rules related to military-connected children in the state, make

recommendations regarding policies impacting military-connected children, and work collaboratively to resolve concerns and disputes. Additionally, earlier this year the Texas Education Agency began the process to establish a cross-agency working group dedicated to addressing issues impacting military-connected students, their families, and the LEAs that serve them. This working group will represent staff from the Curriculum Standards and Support Division, Special Populations Division, Special Education Division, Early Childhood Education Division, Legal Services, and State Funding Division. The working group may expand to include other agency staff as the need arises.

Examples of support provided by Texas Education Agency staff related to the duties and functions of the state council is provided below.

- Assist in the timely resolution of concerns from military families and local education agencies (LEAs) regarding the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children.
- Promote understanding of the Compact through statewide and local presentations for professional organizations, school district staff, military installation educational convenings, and other stakeholders.
- Coordinate communication with school counselors, administrators, and school liaison officers (SLOs) to provide updates, resources, and support for implementation of the Compact and other issues related to military-connected students.
- Conduct site visits to military installations, LEAs, and regional education service centers to speak with district, campus, and military leadership about the best practices and strategies to support military-connected students and learn about the challenges military-connected students encounter specific to location and branch of service.
- Track, oversee, and communicate about the state's Public Education Information Management System data collection on military student indicators.
- Support implementation of the state's newest Public Education Information Management System military student indicators (students with a parent and/or guardian who is veteran connected or who have fallen in the line of duty) through development of communication and resources for school districts and support for the development of the new indicators.
- Promote the Texas Purple Star Campus Designation, which recognizes LEAs that show support and commitment to meeting the unique needs of military-connected students and families.
- Provide resources, guidance, and support for the public via the Texas Education Agency website
- Communicate regularly with parents, school counselors, teachers, and campus and district administrators regarding the provisions of the Compact and how it can best be used to meet the needs of military-connected students.

Private Stakeholder Responses to Charge 6

Raytheon Technologies

In support of the Texas Association of Manufacturers (TAM) submission and as a significant member of the Texas Defense, Aerospace and Aviation Alliance (TDAAA) under TAM, Raytheon Technologies would like to share some background on our efforts to support service members transitioning to civilian employment. At our core, we firmly believe the defense workforce is best supported and enhanced by veteran employment initiatives.

Raytheon Technologies is a leading aerospace and defense company that provides advanced systems and services for commercial, military, and government customers worldwide. Our company was formed in 2020 through the merger of Raytheon Company and the United Technologies Corporation aerospace businesses. With over 190 years of combined innovation and industry leadership, Raytheon Technologies has about 180,000 workers worldwide, \$74B annual revenue, and 40,000 patents.

In Texas, Raytheon Technologies employs over 10,500 people in 18 major locations across all four business units, Pratt & Whitney, Collins Aerospace, Raytheon Missiles & Defense, and Raytheon Intelligence & Space. As part of our local economic impact, we are proud to spend over \$1.6 billion annually with local Texas suppliers. Additionally, at Raytheon Technologies, we encourage our employees to develop new skills and engage in lifelong learning. In Texas alone, we have invested over \$30 million in our Employee Scholar Program (ESP), a comprehensive company-sponsored employee education program, to support nearly 900 completed degrees.

Whether active-duty or veteran, empowering our soldiers is an integral part of Raytheon Technologies' corporate and social identity. Our relationship with the warfighter does not end when he or she steps off the battlefield. It only grows. Veterans' unique experience, product-knowledge, and customer-centric insights are a competitive discriminator and make them key to our mission's success. Raytheon Technologies has several veteran hiring and outreach initiatives to assist transitioning military find meaningful employment and provide mentorship of new veterans who enter the workforce.

RAYVETS began as a grassroots organization with chapters located at Raytheon facilities across the United States. These groups were largely made up of veterans who came together to help support veterans' issues while also connecting employees with the men and women whose lives depend on our products. In 2014, RAYVETS was officially recognized as an employee resource group (ERG), and with chapters in six regions and four countries, it has grown to become the second-largest ERG within Raytheon in five short years.

RAYVETS' mission is to promote and recognize our veterans' identity within the company by increasing their visibility and contributions. They provide all employees an opportunity to understand veterans, thereby enhancing our collective ability to drive cross-business initiatives and grow our business. Additionally, Raytheon prides itself on its existing partnerships with Operation Phoenix, Student Veterans of America, and the Military Transition Assistance Program (TAPS). As part of Operation Phoenix, we aim to attract, recruit, and maintain military

veteran talent. The mission of the partnership is to build a strong partnership with the military community to develop a talent pipeline with military departments and support agencies to establish and maintain a steady stream of highly qualified and diverse candidates.

In 2015, Raytheon announced a \$5 million, multiyear commitment with Student Veterans of America to help military veterans reach their higher education and career goals, particularly in high-demand fields such as STEM. The partnership provides resources, support, and advocacy to service members, such as mentoring and career guidance and scholarships and programs that support student veterans on campus.

Lastly, as part of Raytheon Technologies' membership with the U.S. Department of Defense's Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP), we look to support military spouses with career opportunities at our locations across the country, including in Texas. Our talent acquisition team has direct access to the database of military spouse participants to recruit actively.

Texas has a proud heritage of supporting our military men and women who daily risk their lives to serve our country. Our aerospace and defense industry manufacturers would tell you that they are honored to provide them with the most advanced tools and products that give them the best advantage possible to prevail in any challenge. The companies of the Texas Defense Aerospace and Aviation Alliance and TAM are proud that many of these products are "Texas Made." We are grateful for the attention of the Texas Legislature to this industry sector, and for helping Texas continue to grow this industry, for the sake of our veterans and all Texas workers.

Summary

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the House Defense and Veterans' Affairs Committee was unable to meet in person during the interim. Instead of a public meeting, the committee issued a formal request for information. All of the responses to that request are contained in this report. There are several recommendations for statutory changes from individual stakeholders throughout the report. Due to the fact that committee members were unable to meet and discuss whether they support or oppose recommendations from stakeholders, changes are not recommended by the committee as a whole.