

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services

BILL: SB 1732

INTRODUCER: Senator Wright

SUBJECT: Veterans' Assistance

DATE: February 7, 2024

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Proctor</u>	<u>MS</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>Howard</u>	<u>McKnight</u>	<u>AHS</u>	Favorable
3.	_____	_____	<u>FP</u>	_____

I. Summary:

SB 1732 enhances and expands the current role of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (department) in conducting outreach of services and benefits for veterans and their families or survivors. The bill requires the department, subject to a \$500,000 annual appropriation, to expand its Internet-based, mobile application, print, social media, and in-person outreach programs for the purpose of connecting veterans and their families or survivors with earned services, benefits, and support beyond existing efforts.

The department must annually host at least two public events to disseminate information on benefits and services to in-person and virtual attendees. Information disseminated must include, but is not limited to, educational, medical, insurance, and disability benefits.

The bill requires the department to annually submit a report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must include the number of public events hosted by the department, the number of attendees at each event, and other information the department deems necessary.

The bill is subject to an appropriation and, therefore, has no fiscal impact on state expenditures. See Section V., Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2024.

II. Present Situation:

Veterans in Florida

Other than California and Texas, Florida has the third largest population of veterans.¹ More than 1.4 million veterans reside in the state, that is 12 percent of the state's population of adults aged 18 and over.² Additionally, Florida has the second largest population of veterans who are women, at more than 168,000. Women veterans are one of the fastest growing among the veterans' population.³

State Benefits for Veterans

In addition to federal benefits, veterans in the state have available a multitude of benefits.

The department educates and provides assistance to veterans on accessing services and benefits in housing, health care, disability claims, education, burial benefits, and employment including veterans' preference.⁴

The department also annually produces the Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide that helps connect veterans and their families with earned federal and state benefits, services and support. It also contains useful phone numbers and website addresses to provide additional information to veterans, and a comprehensive listing of current services and benefits available to veterans in the state.⁵

Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs

The department has a key role in the connection of veterans and their families with earned benefits, services, and support, and has an outreach, marketing and branding campaign currently underway to make those connections. The department campaign employs social media in its messaging through Twitter (now "X"), Facebook, and LinkedIn, in addition to the department website FloridaVets.org, a department mobile application, a YouTube Channel with department public service announcements, and the annual benefits guide.⁶

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill creates s. 295.235, F.S., to require, subject to an annual appropriation of \$500,000 by the Legislature, the department to enhance and expand its Internet-based, mobile application, print,

¹ Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Our Veterans*, available at <https://www.floridavets.org/our-veterans/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

² *Id.*

³ Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Women Veterans*, available at <https://floridavets.org/our-veterans/women-veterans/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

⁴ Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Benefits & Services*, available at <https://www.floridavets.org/benefits-services/> (last visited Jan. 17, 2024).

⁵ Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide*, available at <https://floridavets.org/resources/va-benefits-guide/> (last visited Jan. 18, 2024).

⁶ Department of Veterans' Affairs, *2024 Agency Legislative Bill Analysis, SB 1732*, July 1, 2024 (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

social media, and in-person outreach programs for the purpose of connecting veterans and their families or survivors with earned services, benefits, and support beyond existing efforts.

The bill requires that the department must use the appropriated funds to annually host at least two public events to disseminate information on benefits and services to in-person and virtual attendees. Information disseminated must include, but is not limited to, educational, medical, insurance, and disability benefits.

The bill requires the department to annually submit a report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must include the number of public events hosted by the department, the number of attendees at each event, and other information the FDVA deems necessary.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2024.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None identified.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. **Government Sector Impact:**

Although the bill provides an expanded role for the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, the role is conditioned on an annual \$500,000 appropriation by the Legislature.

VI. **Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

VII. **Related Issues:**

None.

VIII. **Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 295.235 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. **Additional Information:**

A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. **Amendments:**

None.