

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/CS/SB 922 — Current and Former Military Personnel

by Criminal Justice Committee; Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee; and Senators Bennett, Detert, Jones, Gaetz, Fasano, Bullard, Evers, Latvala, Haridopolos, Alexander, Altman, Benacquisto, Bogdanoff, Braynon, Dean, Diaz de la Portilla, Dockery, Flores, Garcia, Gardiner, Gibson, Hays, Joyner, Lynn, Margolis, Montford, Negron, Norman, Oelrich, Rich, Richter, Ring, Sachs, Simmons, Siplin, Smith, Sobel, Storms, Thrasher, and Wise

Governor's Medal of Merit

The bill amends s. 14.34, F.S., to modify the meaning of “exceptional meritorious service” as it relates to the Governor’s Medal of Merit to expand the eligibility of an individual to be selected to receive the medal.

If approved by the Governor, this provision takes effect July 1, 2012.

Encroachment

The bill amends s. 163.3175, F.S., to clarify provisions relating to military commanding officer comments on proposed land use changes that may have an impact on the mission of a military installation. The bill clarifies that commanding officer comments on proposed land use changes are advisory to the local government, and provides that the advisory comments must be based upon appropriate data and analyses provided with the comments. The bill also provides that the local government must consider a commanding officer’s comments, underlying studies, and reports in the same manner as comments received by other reviewing agencies representing interests that may be affected by proposed changes such as the environment, public schools, or transportation.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Property Tax Exemption for Deployed Servicemembers

Section 196.173, F.S., provides an exemption for servicemembers that are deployed outside the continental United States, Alaska, or Hawaii in support of certain named military operations. Currently, the list of qualifying operations includes Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn. The beginning and ending dates for each operation are identified.

The bill updates the list of military operations that qualify for the deployed service-member exemption. The bill provides an ending date for Operation New Dawn, which ended on December 15, 2011. The statute is also amended to provide for two new qualifying operations – Operation Noble Eagle, which began on September 15, 2001, and Operation Odyssey Dawn, which began on March 19, 2011 and ended on October 31, 2011.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law and first apply to ad valorem tax rolls for 2012.

Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council

The bill amends s. 265.003, F.S., to create the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council (Council) within the Florida Department of Veterans (FDVA). The Council is created to serve as an advisory body tasked with annually accepting nominations of persons to be considered for induction into the existing Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame. The Council is required to annually transmit a list of 20 nominees to the FDVA for submission to the Governor and Cabinet, who select the nominees to be inducted.

The Council consists of 7 honorably discharged veterans in which the Governor, the Attorney General, the Chief Financial Officer, the Commissioner of Agriculture, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the executive director of the FDVA each appoint one member to the Council. Members of the Council are prohibited from receiving compensation for their services, but are entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses incurred in the performance of their duties. However, the bill prohibits state funds from being used for travel reimbursement purposes.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Grants for Military Base Retention

Current law provides for seven defense-related grant programs administered by the Department of Economic Opportunity to assist defense-dependent communities in their transition from a defense economy to a non-defense economy in light of the federal BRAC process. In an effort to expand the scope of these grant programs to include military base retention and to consolidate programs that have not been funded or implemented since its enactment, the bill amends s. 288.980, F.S., to streamline the existing seven programs into three comprehensive programs – the Military Base Protection Program; the Florida Defense Reinvestment Grant Program; and the Florida Defense Infrastructure Grant Program.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Florida Defense Support Task Force

The bill repeals s. 288.987, F.S., which established the Florida Council for Military Base and Mission Support (Council) and creates a type two transfer of the authority, rights, responsibilities, rules and all other resources of the Council to the Florida Defense Support Task Force (Task Force). In addition, the bill transfers the Council's exemption from public records and public meetings requirements relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the state's military bases and strategies to the Task Force.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.

Florida Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act

The bill amends s. 295.187, F.S., to expand the “Florida Service-Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act” to include certain businesses owned and operated by wartime veterans and renames the act the “Florida Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act.” The bill entitles certain wartime veteran business owners to vendor preference and other benefits currently available to certified service-disabled veteran business owners. In order to be eligible for the benefits provided under the Florida Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act, a wartime veteran business owner must meet the definition of “wartime veteran” as defined in the bill and meet the certification requirements by the Office of Supplier Diversity within the Department of Management Services.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Special Use License Plates

The bill amends s. 320.089, F.S., to authorize the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to issue a special use license plate for a recipient of the Combat Infantry Badge, as well as Vietnam War Veterans and Korean Conflict Veterans. These special use license plates are to be issued upon application and proof of qualifications and upon payment of the license tax imposed by s. 329.08, F.S.

The bill also provides for the issuance of a special use license plate for recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, or Silver Star. These special use license plates are to be issued upon application and proof of qualifications and without payment of the license tax imposed by s. 329.08, F.S.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2012.

Purple Heart Day

The bill designates August 7 of each year as “Purple Heart Day.” It authorizes the Governor to annually issue a proclamation designating August 7 as Purple Heart Day and also encourages public officials, schools, private organizations, and all residents of the state to commemorate Purple Heart Day and to honor those wounded or killed while serving in any branch of the United States Armed Forces.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

T. Patt Maney Veterans’ Treatment Intervention Act

The bill authorizes the chief judge of each judicial circuit to establish a Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (Program) for veterans and servicemembers who are convicted of a criminal offense and who suffer from a mental illness, traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem as a result of their military service. Under the Program, a judge may sentence such veterans and servicemembers in a way that addresses the severity of the condition through services targeted to the individual's needs.

The bill also authorizes a court to impose a condition of supervision requiring probationers or community controlees whose crime was committed on or after July 1, 2012, and who is a veteran or servicemember who suffers from a military-related mental illness, TBI, substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem, to participate in a treatment program capable of treating the offender. Finally, the bill adds both felony and misdemeanor pre-trial intervention programs as eligible treatment programs for veterans and servicemembers.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Postsecondary Education Course Registration for Veterans

The bill requires public postsecondary institutions that offer priority course registration to a segment of the student population to provide priority course registration to veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces who are receiving GI Bill educational benefits. The bill also allows for a veteran's spouse or dependent children to whom the GI Bill educational benefits have been transferred to be granted priority course registration. Additionally, the bill encourages independent postsecondary institutions to provide the same benefit of priority course registration to veterans and their dependents as public postsecondary institutions are required to provide under the bill.

The bill will enable veterans who are utilizing GI Bill educational benefits to have greater access to available courses, thereby decreasing the number of excess hours taken by veterans and reducing the time to graduation.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Road Designations

The bill creates a number of honorary designations of transportation facilities around the state. Designations are as follows:

- U.S. Highway 19/27A/98/State Road 55 between the Suwannee River Bridge and N.E. 592nd Street/Chavous Road/Kate Green Road in Dixie County is designated as "SP4 Thomas Berry Corbin Memorial Highway."
- U.S. Highway 19/98/State Road 55 between N.E. 592nd Street/Chavous Road/Kate Green Road and N.E. 170th Street in Dixie County is designated as "U.S. Navy BMC Samuel Calhoun Chavous, Jr., Memorial Highway."
- State Road 24 between County Road 347 and Bridge Number 340053 in Levy County is designated as "Marine Lance Corporal Brian R. Buesing Memorial Highway."

- U.S. Highway 19/98/State Road 55/S. Main Street between N.W. 1st Avenue and S.E. 2nd Avenue in Levy County is designated as “United States Army Sergeant Karl A. Campbell Memorial Highway.”
- U.S. Highway 27A/State Road 500/Hathaway Avenue between State Road 24/Thrasher Drive and Town Court in Levy County is designated as “U.S. Army SPC James A. Page Memorial Highway.”
- The portion of State Road 101/Mayport Road between State Road A1A and Wonderwood Connector in Duval County is designated as “USS Stark Memorial Drive.”
- The portion of State Road 44 in Lake County between U.S. Highway 441 and State Road 44/East Orange Avenue near Eustis is designated as “Captain Jim Reynolds, Jr., USAF ‘Malibu’ Road.”
- The portion of State Road 19 in Putnam County between U.S. 17/State Road 15 and Carriage Drive is designated as “Veterans Memorial Highway.”
- The portion of State Road 513 between Banana River Drive and Eau Gallie Boulevard in Brevard County is designated as “U.S. Army Sergeant Robert Daniel Sanchez Memorial Highway.”
- The portion of State Road A1A between Pinetree Drive and Eau Gallie Boulevard in Brevard County is designated as “U.S. Marine Corps Corporal Dustin Schrage Highway.”
- The portion of State Road 20/John Sims Parkway (57-040-000) between State Road 85 and the Walton County Line in Okaloosa County is designated as “Purple Heart Memorial Highway.”

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 117-0