

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 Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

BILL: SB 1280

INTRODUCER: Senator Collins

SUBJECT: Veterans

DATE: March 24, 2025

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	Ingram	Proctor	MS	Pre-meeting
2.			AHS	
3.			AP	

I. Summary:

SB 1280 amends multiple provisions regarding servicemembers and veterans. The bill:

- Revises the board of directors membership of Florida is for Veterans, Inc. (Veterans Florida).
- Renames the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program to the Veterans Florida Opportunity (VFO) Program.
- Revises the grant reimbursement limitations under the VFO program and deletes a provision that authorizes for reimbursement of only permanent full-time employees.
- Revises how training costs must be calculated under the VFO program.
- Authorizes grant funds to be used as educational stipends for certain persons training at any location of the University of Florida (UF) Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences.
- Requires Veterans Florida and the UF to enter into an agreement for grant funds.
- Provides a one-time exemption to veterans from the Department of State fees for select incorporation and business filings.
- Exempts Florida National Guard members and their spouses from certain driver license and identification card fees.
- Provides a reduced fee for persons who are active or retired servicemembers for resident lifetime hunting licenses and resident lifetime sportsman's licenses.
- Provides that the chief judge of a judicial circuit has the exclusive authority to determine whether veterans who have been dishonorably discharged may participate in the veterans treatment court program of that circuit, by removing state attorney's authority.

The bill appropriates \$2.5 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the FDVA, for Veterans Florida, for the administration and implementation of the VFO program.

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact. *See* Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2025.

II. Present Situation:

State Approving Agency for Veterans' Education and Training

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) is the designated state approving agency for purposes of veteran's education and training in accordance with federal law and the annual contract between the State of Florida and the federal government.¹

Florida is for Veterans, Inc.

Florida is for Veterans, Inc., (Veterans Florida) is a nonprofit corporation within the FDVA created to promote Florida as a veteran-friendly state.² Veterans Florida encourages and assists retired and recently separated military personnel to keep or make Florida their permanent residence.³ Veterans Florida also assists veterans and their spouses with employment opportunities and encourages the hiring of veterans and their spouses by the business community which lends to its mission in assisting veterans fully transition to civilian life.⁴ Veterans Florida has many duties, including, but not limited to:

- Conducting marketing, awareness, and outreach activities toward its target market.⁵
- Promoting and enhancing the value of military skill sets to businesses.
- Implementing and administering the Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS) program and administering other relevant programs.
- Managing all funds received in a responsible and prudent manner and ensuring that the use of such funds conforms to all applicable laws, bylaws, or contractual requirements.⁶

Veterans Florida is not a unit or entity of state government; however, it is a separate budget entity and not subject to the control, supervision, or direction of the FDVA.⁷ In Fiscal Year 2024-2025, the Legislature appropriated \$2.4 million in nonrecurring funds for veterans employment and training services.⁸

Board of Directors

Veterans Florida is governed by an 11-member board of directors.⁹ In consideration of military experience and business expertise among the appointments, the Governor appoints three members to the board and the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of

¹ Ch. 88-29, s. 24, Laws of Fla. See s. 295.124, F.S.

² Ch. 2014-1, s. 12, Laws of Fla. See s. 295.21(1) and (2), F.S.

³ Dep't of Veterans' Affairs, *Florida is for Veterans, Inc., Brands as Veterans Florida*, available at <https://floridavets.org/florida-is-for-veterans-inc-brands-as-veterans-florida/> (last visited March 23, 2025).

⁴ Section 295.21(2), F.S.

⁵ Section 295.21(3)(a), F.S. defines "target market" to mean servicemembers of the United States Armed Forces who have 24 months or less until discharge, veterans with 36 months or less since discharge, and members of the Florida National Guard or reserves. The term includes spouses of such individuals, and surviving spouses of such individuals who have not remarried.

⁶ Section 295.21(3), F.S. identifies all of the duties required of Veterans Florida.

⁷ Section 295.21(1), F.S.

⁸ Ch. 2024-231, Laws of Fla., Specific Appropriations 605 and 606, Section 3, Human Services, General Appropriations Act.

⁹ Section 295.21(4)(a), F.S.

Representatives each appoint three members to the board who may not be from the body over which he or she presides.¹⁰ In addition, the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives each appoint one member from the body over which he or she presides to serve on the board as ex officio, nonvoting members.¹¹ Members of the board of directors serve for staggered terms of 4 years.¹² Board members serve without compensation but may be reimbursed for travel and per diem expenses incurred while serving.¹³

Veterans Employment and Training Services Program

Created within the FDVA, the VETS program assists in connecting servicemembers, veterans, or their spouses in search of employment with businesses seeking to hire dedicated, well-trained workers and with opportunities for entrepreneurship education, training, and resources.¹⁴ The purpose of the VETS program is to meet the workforce demands of businesses in the state by facilitating access to training and education in high-demand fields and to inspire the growth of veteran owned small businesses.¹⁵ In accordance with its duties under s. 252.21(3), F.S., Veterans Florida administers the VETS program and performs many functions including, but not limited to:

- Conducting marketing and recruiting efforts.
- Assisting individuals in the target market¹⁶ who reside in or relocate to Florida and who seek employment with the target industry or secondary target industry business.
- Offering skills assessments and assisting in establishing employment goals.
- Assisting Florida target industry and secondary industry businesses in recruiting and hiring individuals in the target market. Veterans Florida provides services to Florida businesses to meet their hiring needs by connecting businesses with suitable applicants for employment. Suitable applicants include veterans or veterans' spouses who have appropriate job skills or may need additional training to meet the specific needs of a business.
- Providing information about the state and federal benefits of hiring veterans.
- Creating a grant program to provide funding to assist individuals in the target market in meeting the workforce-skill needs of target industry and secondary industry businesses seeking to hire, promote, or generally improve specialized skills of veterans, establish criteria for approval of requests for funding, and maximize the use of funding for this program.
- Contracting with entities to administer an entrepreneur initiative program for individuals in the target market in Florida which connects business leaders in the state with such individuals seeking to become entrepreneurs.
- Administering a SkillBridge¹⁷ initiative for target industry and secondary industry businesses in this state and for eligible individuals in the target market who reside in, or who wish to reside in, this state.¹⁸

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Section 295.21(4)(c), F.S.

¹³ Section 295.21(4)(e), F.S.

¹⁴ Section 295.22(3), F.S.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ See U.S. Dep't of Defense, DOD SkillBridge, Program Overview-What is SkillBridge, available at <https://skillbridge.osd.mil/program-overview.htm> (March 23, 2025).

¹⁸ Section 295.22(4), F.S.

Under the VETS program, Veterans Florida may assist state agencies and entities with recruiting veteran talent into their workforces.¹⁹ Veterans Florida may collaborate with other state agencies and entities for outreach, information exchange, marketing, and referrals regarding programs and initiatives.²⁰ One of the entities that Veterans Florida collaborates with under s. 295.22(5), F.S., is the Department of Commerce and efforts of the now defunct Florida Defense Support Task Force which was replaced by a Department of Commerce direct-support organization in 2024.²¹

Grant Program

Within a grant program created by Veterans Florida, grant funds may be used only in the absence of available veteran-specific federally funded programs and may fund specialized training specific to a particular business.²²

- Grants may be allocated only upon a review that includes, but is not limited to, documentation of accreditation and licensure and as such, grant funds may be prioritized to be used for:
 - A certificate, a license, or nondegree training from the Master Credentials List;²³
 - Any federally created certifications or licenses; and
 - Any skills-based industry certifications or licenses deemed relevant or necessary by Veterans Florida.²⁴
- Costs and expenditures are limited to \$8,000 per trainee. Qualified businesses must cover the entire cost for all of the training provided before receiving reimbursement from Veterans Florida equal to 50 percent of the cost to train a veteran who is a permanent, full-time employee. Eligible costs and expenditures include, but are not limited to:
 - Tuition and fees.
 - Books and classroom materials.
 - Rental fees for facilities.²⁵
- Before funds are allocated for a request, Veterans Florida must prepare a grant agreement which must include certain identifications and permissions.²⁶
- A business may receive a grant fund under any state program and a grant within the VETS program for the same veteran trainee.²⁷

University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS)

The UF/IFAS is a federal-state-county partnership devoted to developing familiarity with agriculture, human and natural resources, and the life sciences.

UF/IFAS satisfies the University of Florida's (UF) land grant mission by working to enhance and sustain the quality of human life through its research facilities, extension services offered in

¹⁹ Section 295.22(5), F.S.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ Ch. 2024-234, Laws of Fla.

²² Section 295.22(4)(d), F.S.

²³ Section 445.004(4)(h), F.S.

²⁴ Section 295.22(4)(d)1., F.S.

²⁵ Section 295.22(4)(d)2., F.S.

²⁶ Section 295.22(4)(d)3., F.S.

²⁷ Section 295.22(4)(d)4., F.S.

every county throughout the state, and education at the UF College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.²⁸

The Morrill Act of 1862 established the Land Grant university system. On July 2, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed into law what is generally referred to as the Land Grant Act. Sponsored by U.S. Representative Justin Smith Morrill of Vermont, the legislation granted to each state 30,000 acres of public land for each Senator and Representative under apportionment based on the 1860 census. Proceeds from the sale of these lands were to be invested in a perpetual endowment fund which would provide support for colleges of agriculture and mechanical arts in each of the states.²⁹

The Florida Agricultural College established at Lake City in 1884 under the Morrill Act eventually became the UF's College of Agriculture in 1906. At that time, the East Florida Seminary joined the college and was moved to Gainesville. The renamed University of Florida was the land grant college in Florida, and the Agricultural Experiment Station became a unit of the College of Agriculture at UF. In present day, research and education programs are operated by the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station at 22 locations throughout Florida.³⁰

In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act established the Cooperative Extension Service specifying that the service would be associated with a land grant college. The Smith-Lever Act also required that federal funds be matched with local funds. Florida Cooperative Extension is a partnership between UF/IFAS, United States Department of Agriculture, and county governments in Florida to provide scientific knowledge and expertise to the public through nonresident educational programs. Operating as part of UF/IFAS, Florida Cooperative Extension serves the state's 67 counties by providing information and conducting educational programs on issues relating to agriculture, world markets, conservation, food safety, child and family development, consumer credit, and youth development.³¹

Department of State

The Department of State (DOS), created in s. 20.10, F.S., is composed of six divisions: Elections, Historical Resources, Corporations, Library and Information Services, Arts and Culture, and Administration. The head of the DOS is the Secretary of State (Secretary). The Secretary is appointed by and serves at the pleasure of the Governor, subject to confirmation by the Senate. The Secretary performs functions conferred by the State Constitution upon the custodian of state records.³²

One of the DOS's responsibilities includes receiving and maintaining incorporation and business filings required in law, such as service of process for legal proceedings,³³ articles of

²⁸ UF/IFAS University of Florida, *About UF/IFAS*, available at <https://ifas.ufl.edu/about-us/> (last visited March 23, 2025).

²⁹ UF/IFAS University of Florida, *Land Grant & Sea Grant: Acts, History & Institutions*, available at <https://ifas.ufl.edu/land-grant-sea-grant-acts-history/> (last visited March 23, 2025).

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Section 20.10(1), F.S.

³³ *See, e.g.,* ss. 48.061, 48.062, and 48.181, F.S.

incorporation,³⁴ and registration of fictitious names.³⁵ A person who wants to file incorporation and business filings with the DOS must pay the appropriate fee. Amongst the filings received and maintained by the DOS, and the appropriate filing fee associated with them, are those identified in:

- Chapter 605, Florida Revised Limited Liability Company Act: limited liability companies file with the DOS a registration with their name, registered agent, and registered office location;³⁶
- Chapter 607, Florida Business Corporation Act: corporations file their articles of incorporation, changes to their registered office or registered agent, and must file an annual report, among other documents;³⁷
- Chapter 617, Corporations Not For Profit: requires not for profit corporations to file with the DOS their articles of incorporation, changes to their registered office or registered agent, and must file an annual report, among other documents;³⁸ and
- Chapter 620, Partnership Laws: limited partnerships must file a certificate of limited partnership with the DOS containing the name of the limited partnership, the address, and the business address of each general partner³⁹ as well as an annual report, among other documents.⁴⁰ General partnerships must file a partnership registration statement and an annual report, among other documents.⁴¹

Filing fees vary. The following is a sampling of those fees:

Department of State Filing Fees		
Filing articles of organization or articles of revocation of dissolution.	s. 605.0213(2), F.S.	\$ 100.00
Filing a certificate designating a registered agent.	s. 605.0213(7), F.S.	\$ 25.00
Articles of incorporation.	s. 607.0122(1), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Designation of and acceptance by registered agent.	s. 607.0122(5), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Articles of incorporation.	s. 617.0122(1), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Designation of and acceptance by registered agent.	s. 617.0122(5), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Filing an original certificate of limited partnership.	s. 620.1109(2), F.S.	\$ 965.00
Filing a certificate designating a registered agent.	s. 620.1109(8)(a), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Filing a partnership registration statement.	s. 620.81055(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 50.00

Florida National Guard

The National Guard is unique among militia in that it serves the country in both the local community and overseas. The dual mission of a National Guard member means that each member serves through both the National Guard of the state and through the U.S. Army or the U.S. Air Force.⁴² A member of the Florida National Guard (FNG) serves either in the state Army

³⁴ Section 607.0203, F.S.

³⁵ Section 865.09, F.S.

³⁶ Sections 605.0112(5), 605.0113(4), and 605.0113(5), F.S. *See* s. 605.0206, F.S.

³⁷ Sections 607.0203, 607.0502, and 607.1622, F.S. *See* s. 607.0120(9), F.S.

³⁸ Sections 617.0203, 617.0502, and 617.1622, F.S.

³⁹ Sections 620.1109 and 620.1201(1)(a)–(e), F.S.

⁴⁰ Section 620.1210, F.S.

⁴¹ Sections 620.8105 and 620.9003, F.S.

⁴² *Id.*

National Guard or in the state Air National Guard, considered a reserve component of each of those armed forces.⁴³ Overseeing the FNG as a federally-recognized officer, the adjutant general is appointed by the Governor and subject to Senate confirmation.⁴⁴

The Department of Military Affairs provides management oversight and administrative support to the FNG.⁴⁵

Driver Licenses

A driver license in this state is a certificate that, subject to all other requirements of law, authorizes an individual to drive a motor vehicle and denotes a motor vehicle operator's license as defined in 49 U.S.C. s. 30301.⁴⁶ Florida driver licenses may include endorsements which permits the driver to drive certain types of vehicles or to transport certain types of property or a certain number of passengers.⁴⁷

Non-Commercial Driver Licenses

A person with a Class E driver license may drive any noncommercial motor vehicle with Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) less than 26,001 pounds, which includes a passenger car, 15 passenger van including the driver, trucks or recreational vehicles and two or three wheel motor vehicles 50 cc or less, such as mopeds or small scooters.⁴⁸ A Class E learner's license permits a person to drive a motor vehicle less than 8,000 pounds. A learner's license has the following conditions, the person:

- Must have a licensed driver at least 21 years old occupying the closest seat to the right of the driver;
- Can only drive during daylight hours during the first three months from the original issue date and until 10:00 p.m., thereafter; and
- Is not allowed to operate motorcycles.^{49,50}

For a person authorized to operate a motorcycle, a “motorcycle also” endorsement will be indicated by an “A” in the endorsement field located on the front of the card and “A-MTRCL Also” on the back of the card in the endorsement field.⁵¹ A “motorcycle only” endorsement will be indicated by an “O” in the endorsement field located on the front of the card and an “O-MTRCL Only” on the back of the card in the endorsement field.⁵²

⁴³ Section 250.01(3), (6), and (13), F.S.

⁴⁴ Section 250.10(1), F.S.

⁴⁵ Dep't of Military Affairs, *Home Page*, available at <https://dma.myflorida.com/> (last visited March 20, 2025).

⁴⁶ Section 322.01(18), F.S.

⁴⁷ Section 322.01(19), F.S.

⁴⁸ Dep't of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV), *Driver Licenses & ID Cards*, available at <https://www.flhsmv.gov/driver-licenses-id-cards/general-information/license-classes-endorsements-designations/> (last visited March 20, 2025).

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ Section 322.01(28), F.S., defines “motorcycle” to mean any means any self-propelled vehicle, including a motor vehicle combination, not operated upon rails or guideway, excluding vehicles moved solely by human power, motorized wheelchairs, and electric bicycles, as defined in s. 316.003, F.S.

⁵¹ DHSMV *supra* note 48.

⁵² *Id.*

Commercial Driver Licenses

A commercial driver license means a Class A, Class B, or Class C driver license issued in accordance with the requirements of ch. 322, F.S. According to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles (DHSMV), the following are commercial driver license endorsements with their descriptions:

- Class A: Trucks or truck combinations weighing with a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating of 26,001 lbs. or more, provided towed vehicle is more than 10,000 lbs.
- Class B: Straight trucks weighing 26,001 lbs. Gross Vehicle Weight Rating or more.
- Class C: Vehicles transporting hazardous materials⁵³ which are required to be placarded, or vehicles designed to transport more than 15 persons including the driver with a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating of less than 26,001 lbs.⁵⁴

Identification Cards

Any person who is 5 years of age or older, or any person who has a disability, regardless of age, who applies for a disabled parking permit under s. 320.0848, F.S., may be issued an identification card by the DHSMV upon completion of an application and payment of an application fee.⁵⁵

Driver license and identification card fees vary. The following is a sampling of those fees:

Driver License and Identification Card Fees		
Original or Renewal Commercial Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 75.00
Conditional Commercial Driver License ⁵⁶	s. 322.21(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Commercial Driver License Delinquent Fee	s. 322.21(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 15.00
Original Class E Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(b), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Renewal or Extension of a Class E Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(c), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Renewal or Extension of a Class E Driver License Delinquent Fee	s. 322.21(1)(c), F.S.	\$ 15.00
Original Driver License Restricted to Motorcycle Use	s. 322.21(1)(d), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Replacement Driver License (if lost or destroyed)	s. 322.21(1)(e), F.S.	\$ 25.00
Original, Renewal, or Replacement Identification Card	s. 322.21(1)(f), F.S.	\$ 25.00

Fee Exemptions

Any member of the Armed Forces or his or her spouse, daughter, son, stepdaughter, or stepson, who holds a Florida driver license and who presents an affidavit showing that he or she was out of the state due to service in the Armed Forces of the United States (U.S.A.F.) at the time of license expiration is exempt from paying the delinquent fee if the application for renewal is made within 15 months after the expiration of his or her license and within 90 days after the date of

⁵³ Section 322.01(25), F.S. See 49 U.S.C. s. 5103, subpart F of 49 C.F.R. part 172, and 42 C.F.R. part 73.

⁵⁴ DHSMV *supra* note 48.

⁵⁵ Section 322.051(1), F.S.

⁵⁶ Section 322.21, F.S.(1)(a), F.S., provides that if an applicant has completed training and is applying for employment or is currently employed in a public or nonpublic school system that requires the commercial license, the fee is the same as for a Class E driver license.

discharge or transfer to a military or naval establishment in this state as shown in the affidavit. However, such a person is not exempt from any reexamination requirement.⁵⁷

Any veteran honorably discharged from the Armed Forces who has been issued a valid identification card by the FDVA in accordance with s. 295.17, F.S., has been determined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or its predecessor to have a 100-percent total and permanent service-connected disability rating for compensation, or has been determined to have a service-connected total and permanent disability rating of 100 percent, is in receipt of disability retirement pay from any branch of the U.S.A.F., and who is qualified to obtain a driver license under ch. 322, F.S., is exempt from all fees required by s. 322.21, F.S.⁵⁸

An applicant for an identification card who meets any of the following criteria is exempt from the fee for an original, renewal, or replacement identification card:

- The applicant presents a valid Florida voter's registration card to the DHSMV and attests that he or she is experiencing a financial hardship.
- The applicant presents evidence satisfactory to the DHSMV that he or she is homeless as defined in s. 414.0252(7), F.S.
- The applicant presents evidence satisfactory to the DHSMV that his or her annual income is at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level.
- The applicant is a juvenile offender who is in the custody or under the supervision of the Department of Juvenile Justice, who is receiving services pursuant to s. 985.461, F.S., and whose identification card is issued by the DHSMV's mobile issuing units.⁵⁹

An applicant for an identification card who is 80 years of age or older and whose driving privilege is denied due to failure to pass a vision test administered in accordance with s. 322.18(5), F.S., is exempt from the fee for an original identification card.⁶⁰

Recreational Licenses

General law and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) rules prohibit the taking of game, freshwater or saltwater fish, or fur-bearing animals within this state without having first obtained a license, permit, or authorization number and paid the associated fees.⁶¹ Resident and nonresident hunting and fishing licenses and permits and their associated fees are set out in statute.⁶²

Hunting and Fishing Annual Licenses

Under current law, a member of the U.S.A.F. stationed in the state and his or her family member who resides with the U.S.A.F. member is considered a resident of this state for purposes of applying for a hunting, fishing, or other recreational licenses.⁶³ A state resident pays reduced fees on licenses, such as paying \$15.50 for an annual freshwater or saltwater fishing license, rather

⁵⁷ Section 322.21(6), F.S.

⁵⁸ Section 322.21(7), F.S.

⁵⁹ Section 322.21(1)(f), F.S.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ Section 379.354(1), F.S.

⁶² Section 379.354, F.S.

⁶³ Section 379.101(30)(b)1., F.S.

than \$45.50; \$15.50 for an annual hunting license to take game, rather than \$150; and \$46.50 for the option of an annual combined hunting, freshwater fishing, and saltwater fishing license (no such option is available for a combination license for a nonresident).⁶⁴

Additionally, disabled veterans; active duty or reserve duty servicemembers of the U.S.A.F., the U.S. Coast Guard, military reserves, the FNG, or the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve; the immediate family, such as a parent, spouse, or child, of such disabled veterans and servicemembers; and one additional person designated to assist a disabled veteran, are exempt from having to possess a hunting, freshwater fishing, or saltwater fishing license or permit during outdoor recreational events permitted by the FWC whose primary purpose is the rehabilitation or enjoyment of disabled veterans.⁶⁵

Gold Sportsman's License

An annual military gold sportsman's license is available to a state resident who is an active or retired member of the U.S.A.F., U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the U.S. Coast Guard, or the U.S. Coast Guard Reserve.⁶⁶ The fee for the annual military gold sportsman's license is \$18.50, rather than the \$98.50 charged for the annual gold sportsman's license, which authorizes the same activities.⁶⁷ Activities authorized under both licenses include the taking of freshwater fish, saltwater fish, and game, subject to state and federal law, rules, and regulations.⁶⁸ Other eligible activities include those authorized by a management area permit, a muzzle-loading gun season permit, a crossbow season permit, a turkey permit, a Florida waterfowl permit, a deer permit, an archery season permit, a snook permit, and a spiny lobster permit.⁶⁹

Resident Lifetime Hunting License

A lifetime hunting license is available to a state resident only, for a person who is:

- Four years of age or younger, for a fee of \$200.
- Five years of age or older, but under 13 years of age, for a fee of \$350.
- Thirteen years of age or older, for a fee of \$500.⁷⁰

Activities authorized under a lifetime hunting license include taking, or attempting to take or possess, game consistent with the state and federal laws and regulations and rules of the commission in effect at the time of the taking.⁷¹ Other eligible activities include all activities authorized by a muzzle-loading gun season permit, a crossbow season permit, a turkey permit, an archery season permit, a Florida waterfowl permit, a deer permit, and a management area permit, excluding fishing.⁷²

⁶⁴ Compare s. 379.354(4) with s. 379.354(5), F.S.

⁶⁵ Section 379.353(2)(q), F.S.

⁶⁶ Section 379.354(4)(j), F.S.

⁶⁷ Section 379.354(4)(i) and (j), F.S.

⁶⁸ *Id.*

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ Section 379.354(11)(a), F.S.

⁷¹ Section 379.354(11)(b), F.S.

⁷² *Id.*

Resident Lifetime Sportsman's License

A lifetime sportsman's license is available to a state resident only, for a person who is:

- Four years of age or younger, for a fee of \$400.
- Five years of age or older, but under 13 years of age, for a fee of \$700.
- Thirteen years of age or older, for a fee of \$1,000.⁷³

Activities authorized under a lifetime sportsman's license include taking, or attempting to take or possess, freshwater and saltwater fish, and game, consistent with the state and federal laws and regulations and rules of the commission in effect at the time of taking.⁷⁴ Other eligible activities include all activities authorized by a management area permit, a muzzle-loading gun season permit, a crossbow season permit, a turkey permit, an archery season permit, a Florida waterfowl permit, a deer permit, a snook permit, and a spiny lobster permit.⁷⁵

Veterans Treatment Court Program

Veteran treatment courts are problem-solving courts addressing the root causes of criminal behavior.⁷⁶ Modeled after drug court treatment programs, veteran treatment courts divert eligible veterans and servicemembers into treatment programs for military-related conditions or war-related trauma, including:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder;
- Mental illness;
- Traumatic brain injury; and
- Substance abuse.⁷⁷

In 2012, the Legislature authorized each judicial circuit to establish the Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program, to serve veterans⁷⁸ and servicemembers⁷⁹ who are convicted of a criminal offense and who suffer from a military-related mental illness, traumatic brain injury, substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem.⁸⁰ Under the court program such defendants could be sentenced in accordance with general law,⁸¹ in a manner that appropriately addressed the severity of the illnesses or conditions through services tailored to the individual needs of a participant.⁸²

In 2021, the Legislature revised and redesignated the existing military veterans and servicemembers court program, as the veterans treatment court program to create a statewide standard for the creation, operation and effort to detect, discern, and assist veterans in correcting

⁷³ Section 379.354(12)(a), F.S.

⁷⁴ Section 379.354(12)(b), F.S.

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ Florida State Courts, *Problem-Solving Courts*, available at <http://www.flcourts.org/resources-and-services/court-improvement/problem-solving-courts/> (last visited March 20, 2025).

⁷⁷ Florida State Courts, *Problem-Solving Courts - Veterans Courts*, available at <https://www.flcourts.gov/Resources-Services/Office-of-Problem-Solving-Courts/Veterans-Courts> (last visited Mar20 2025).

⁷⁸ Section 1.01, F.S. (2012).

⁷⁹ Section 250.01, F.S. (2012).

⁸⁰ Ch. 2012-159, Laws of Fla.

⁸¹ Ch. 921, F.S. (2012).

⁸² Ch. 2012-159, Laws of Fla.

the behaviors and choices that lead to the veterans' court involvement.⁸³ The purpose of a veterans treatment court program is to address the underlying causes of a veteran's involvement with the judicial system through the use of specialized dockets, multidisciplinary teams, and evidence-based treatment.⁸⁴ A veterans treatment court program must use nonadversarial approaches to resolve such underlying causes.⁸⁵

A court with jurisdiction over criminal cases is authorized to create and administer a veterans treatment court and a chief judge may issue administrative orders regarding such court.⁸⁶ A veterans treatment court program may adjudicate misdemeanors and felonies.⁸⁷ In addition, under current law:

- The chief judge may issue administrative orders concerning the program.
- The chief judge and state attorney of the judicial circuit that creates and administers a veterans treatment court program have the exclusive authority to determine whether veterans who have been dishonorably discharged may participate in the veterans treatment court program within the circuit.⁸⁸

Current law requires a veterans treatment program to adopt policies and procedures to implement key components of a veterans treatment program,⁸⁹ and in addition, the veterans treatment program is authorized to adopt supplemental policies and procedures.⁹⁰ Each veterans treatment court program must seek input from the state attorney and other interested persons in developing and adopting such policies and procedures.⁹¹ The veterans treatment court program must also create a record of the adopted policies and procedures.⁹²

Eligibility and Admission

In accordance with s. 394.47891, F.S., a defendant means a veteran⁹³ or servicemember⁹⁴ who has been charged with or convicted of a crime.⁹⁵

A defendant may participate in a veterans treatment court program if he or she is approved by the state attorney, in consultation with the court, and meets the following criteria:

⁸³ Section 394.47891(1), F.S.

⁸⁴ *Id.*

⁸⁵ *Id.*

⁸⁶ Section 394.47891(3)(a), F.S.

⁸⁷ Section 394.47891(3)(b), F.S.

⁸⁸ Section 394.47891(3)(c) and (d), F.S.

⁸⁹ Section 394.47891(6)(a), F.S.

⁹⁰ Section 394.47891(7), F.S.

⁹¹ Section 394.47891(5)(a), F.S.

⁹² Section 394.47891(5)(b), F.S.

⁹³ Section 394.47891(3)(d), F.S., for purposes of the veterans treatment court programs, “veteran” is defined as a person who has served in the military.

⁹⁴ Section 394.47891(2)(c), F.S., for purposes of the veterans treatment court programs, servicemember is defined as a member of the active or reserve components of the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, or Coast Guard; a member of the Florida National Guard; a current or former contractor for the United States Department of Defense; or a current or former military member of a foreign allied country.

⁹⁵ Section 394.47891(2)(a), F.S.

- The defendant has a service-related mental health condition, service-related traumatic brain injury, service-related substance use disorder, or service-related psychological problem or has experienced military sexual trauma.
- The defendant's participation in the veterans treatment court program is in the interest of justice and of benefit to the defendant and the community.⁹⁶

In making a determination of the foregoing, the state attorney, in consultation with the court, must consider:

- The nature and circumstances of the offense charged.
- The special characteristics or circumstances of the defendant and any victim or alleged victim, including any recommendation of the victim or alleged victim.
- The defendant's criminal history and whether the defendant previously participated in a veterans treatment court program or similar program.
- Whether the defendant's needs exceed the treatment resources available to the veterans treatment court program.
- The impact on the community of the defendant's participation and treatment in the veterans treatment court program.
- Recommendations of any law enforcement agency involved in investigating or arresting the defendant.
- If the defendant owes restitution, the likelihood of payment during the defendant's participation in the veterans treatment court program.
- Any mitigating circumstances.
- Any other circumstances reasonably related to the defendant's case.⁹⁷

A defendant who meets those eligibility requirements may be admitted to a veterans treatment court program at any stage of a criminal proceeding and must submit an application to the state attorney if he or she is seeking to participate in the program.⁹⁸ The state attorney must review each application and determine whether the defendant meets the eligibility requirements under the provisions of s. 394.47891(8), F.S.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

State Approving Agency for Veterans' Education and Training

The bill amends s. 295.124, F.S., to update the federal law reference for the designation of the state approving agency for purposes of veterans' education and training. The updated reference is 38 U.S.C. s. 3671.⁹⁹

Florida is for Veterans, Inc.

The bill amends s. 295.21, F.S., renaming the VETS program as the Veterans Florida Opportunity (VFO) Program to conform with the bill provisions in s. 295.22, F.S. Additionally,

⁹⁶ Section 394.47891(8)(a), F.S.

⁹⁷ Section 394.47891(8)(b), F.S.

⁹⁸ Section 394.47891(4), F.S.

⁹⁹ 38 U.S.C. s. 3671 (2021). See United States Code available at <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?req=granuleid:USC-prelim-title38-section1771&num=0&edition=prelim> (last visited March 20, 2025).

the bill clarifies that the three members appointed by the Governor, three members appointed by the President of the Senate, and three members appointed by Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives are all voting members of the Veterans Florida board of directors (board). The bill also revises the membership of the board to include an additional member who is appointed by the Governor who is a secretary, or his or her designee, with experience in economic or workforce development from an executive agency. Such member will be an ex officio, nonvoting member.

Veterans Employment and Training Services

The bill amends s. 295.22, F.S., renaming the VETS program as the VFO Program.

Grant Program

The bill also:

- Revises the limits of grant reimbursements to \$5,000 per eligible trainee per fiscal year, rather than the \$8,000 cost and expenditure total limitation per trainee.
- Removes the reimbursement limit of 50 percent of the cost to train a veteran for a qualified business.
- Removes the requirement that the veteran be a permanent, full-time employee of a qualified business in order to receive a training reimbursement.
- Requires that training costs for a trainee in a fiscal year be equal to or greater than \$5,000.
- Clarifies that the duration, not estimated duration, of the instructional program be identified as part of the grant agreement between Veterans Florida and the business requesting funds.

The bill authorizes grant funds to be used as educational stipends for individuals in the target market¹⁰⁰ while training at any location of the UF/IFAS within this state. Veterans Florida and the UF are required to enter into an agreement before any grant funds are expended, and Veterans Florida is required to determine the amount and structure of any educational stipend. Such stipend may be used only for such training for a period of at least 4 months and no more than 6 months, in the absence of veteran-specific federally funded programs.

For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the bill appropriates \$2.5 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the FDVA for purposes of funding Veterans Florida administration and implementation of programs.¹⁰¹

Fee Exemptions and Discounts

Department of State Filing Fees

The bill creates s. 295.25, F.S., to exempt veterans who are state residents from having to pay applicable fees collected by the DOS for the specific filings of:

- Articles of organization;
- Articles of incorporation;

¹⁰⁰ Section 295.21(3)(a), F.S.

¹⁰¹ Sections 295.21(3)(d), 295.21(3)(f), and 295.22, F.S., describe those programs Veterans Florida administers and implements including, Veterans Employment and Training Services Program and other relevant programs.

- A certificate of limited partnership;
- A partnership registration statement; or
- A designation of a registered agent.

Fees charged for filings, exempted in the bill, are as follows:

Department of State Filing Fees		
Filing articles of organization or articles of revocation of dissolution.	s. 605.0213(2), F.S.	\$ 100.00
Filing a certificate designating a registered agent.	s. 605.0213(7), F.S.	\$ 25.00
Articles of incorporation.	s. 607.0122(1), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Designation of and acceptance by registered agent.	s. 607.0122(5), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Articles of incorporation.	s. 617.0122(1), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Designation of and acceptance by registered agent.	s. 617.0122(5), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Filing an original certificate of limited partnership.	s. 620.1109(2), F.S.	\$ 965.00
Filing a certificate designating a registered agent.	s. 620.1109(8)(a), F.S.	\$ 35.00
Filing a partnership registration statement.	s. 620.81055(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 50.00

The bill provides that a veteran may apply for this exemption only once.

Driver License and Identification Card

The bill amends s. 322.21, F.S., to exempt a member of the FNG who has been issued a valid identification card by the Department of Military Affairs and his or her spouse from the following fees:

Driver License and Identification Card Fees		
Original or Renewal Commercial Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 75.00
Conditional Commercial Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Commercial Driver License Delinquent Fee	s. 322.21(1)(a), F.S.	\$ 15.00
Original Class E Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(b), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Renewal or Extension of a Class E Driver License	s. 322.21(1)(c), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Renewal or Extension of a Class E Driver License Delinquent Fee	s. 322.21(1)(c), F.S.	\$ 15.00
Original Driver License Restricted to Motorcycle Use	s. 322.21(1)(d), F.S.	\$ 48.00
Replacement Driver License (if lost or destroyed)	s. 322.21(1)(e), F.S.	\$ 25.00
Original, Renewal, or Replacement Identification Card	s. 322.21(1)(f), F.S.	\$ 25.00

Resident Lifetime Hunting Licenses

The bill amends s. 379.354, F.S., providing that persons who are active or retired members of the of the U.S.A.F., the U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the United States Coast Guard, or the United States Coast Guard Reserve may purchase a resident lifetime hunting license for a fee of \$250, rather than \$500, which is the fee for state residents who are persons 13 years of age or older.¹⁰²

¹⁰² 379.354(11)(a), F.S.

Activities authorized under a lifetime hunting license include taking, or attempting to take or possess, game consistent with the state and federal laws and regulations and rules of the commission in effect at the time of the taking. Other eligible activities include all activities authorized by a muzzle-loading gun season permit, a crossbow season permit, a turkey permit, an archery season permit, a Florida waterfowl permit, a deer permit, and a management area permit, excluding fishing.¹⁰³

Resident Lifetime Sportsman's License

The bill amends s. 379.354, F.S., providing that persons who are active or retired members of the of the U.S.A.F., the U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the United States Coast Guard, or the United States Coast Guard Reserve may purchase a resident lifetime sportsman's license for a fee of \$400, rather than \$1000, which is the fee for state residents who are persons 13 years of age or older.¹⁰⁴

Activities authorized by the purchase of lifetime sportsman's license, include taking, or attempting to take or possess, freshwater and saltwater fish, and game, consistent with the state and federal laws and regulations and rules of the commission in effect at the time of taking. Other eligible activities include all activities authorized by a management area permit, a muzzle-loading gun season permit, a crossbow season permit, a turkey permit, an archery season permit, a Florida waterfowl permit, a deer permit, a snook permit, and a spiny lobster permit.¹⁰⁵

Veterans Treatment Court Programs

The bill amends s. 394.47891, F.S., deleting the provision that the state attorney of a judicial circuit that creates and administers a veterans treatment court program is part of an exclusive authority to determine whether veterans who have been dishonorably discharged may participate in the veteran treatment court program of the circuit. The state attorney may still consult with the court on a defendant's eligibility and his or her admission to the veteran treatment court program.¹⁰⁶ As a result of the deletion, the bill provides that the chief judge of the judicial circuit that creates and administers a veterans treatment court program has the exclusive authority to determine whether veterans who have been dishonorably discharged may participate in the veterans treatment court program of the circuit.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2025.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

¹⁰³ 379.354(11)(b), F.S.

¹⁰⁴ 379.354(12)(a), F.S.

¹⁰⁵ 379.354(12)(b), F.S.

¹⁰⁶ Section 394.47891(4) and (8), F.S.

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:

The bill does not create new fees, however it exempts certain servicemembers and veterans from certain state filing fees and driver license and identification card fees. In addition, the bill also reduces the fees for resident lifetime hunting and sportsman's licenses members of the U.S.A.F., U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the United States Coast Guard, or the United States Coast Guard Reserve.

B. Private Sector Impact:

The bill authorizes the use of grant funds as educational stipends for trainees with the UF/IFAS as part of an agreement required by the bill between Veterans Florida and UF. The bill may have a positive fiscal impact on those trainees who qualify for, and receive, an educational stipend, in addition to any training received through the Veterans Florida programs.

The bill may have a positive fiscal impact on veterans who are state residents. Such individuals may be eligible for a one-time exemption from the DOS filing fees for articles of organization, articles of incorporation, certificate of limited partnership, partnership registration statement, or designation as a registered agent.

The bill may have a positive fiscal impact on FNG members and their spouses who qualify under one of the new exemptions. Such individuals may request the DHSMV to issue, replace, or renew certain driver licenses and identification cards at no charge. In addition, such individuals may also request a delinquent fee exemption.

The bill may have a positive fiscal impact on active or retired members of the of the U.S.A.F., the U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the United States Coast Guard, or the United States Coast Guard Reserve who may receive discounts on resident lifetime hunting and resident lifetime sportsman's licenses.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill authorizes the use of grant funds as educational stipends for trainees with the UF/IFAS as part of an agreement required by the bill between Veterans Florida and UF. Further, the bill revises the limits of grant reimbursements to \$5,000 per eligible trainee per fiscal year, rather than the \$8,000 cost and expenditure total limitation per trainee. The foregoing program modifications to the use of grant funds may result in an increase in training costs for an eligible trainee and have the effect of reducing the number of applicants that may be trained with the same level of funding.

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on the state for the one-time exemption from the DOS filing fees for articles of organization, articles of incorporation, certificate of limited partnership, partnership registration statement, or designation as a registered agent, for veterans who reside in this state.

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on the state for the exemptions from driver license and identification card fees for FNG members and their spouses.

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on the state for the reduced fees established for persons who are active or retired members of the of the U.S.A.F., the U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the United States Coast Guard, or the United States Coast Guard Reserve for the resident lifetime hunting license and resident lifetime sportsman's license. The number of active or retired servicemembers who may have purchased a resident lifetime hunting license or resident lifetime sportsman's license in the past and the number of active or retired servicemembers who may purchase such licenses in the future is indeterminate. The fee for the resident lifetime hunting license for persons 13 years of age or older is \$500, and the fee established by the bill for active or retired servicemembers is \$250, a difference of \$250. The fee for the resident lifetime sportsman's license for persons 13 years of age or older is \$1000, and the fee established by the bill for active or retired servicemembers is \$400, a difference of \$600.

The bill appropriates \$2.5 million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the FDVA, for Veterans Florida for the 2025-2026 fiscal year for the administration and implementation of programs. For the 2024-2025 fiscal year, the Legislature appropriated \$2.4 million in nonrecurring funds to the FDVA for Veterans Florida for the administration and implementation of programs.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

The title on line 2 of the bill solely reflects veterans and does not include other servicemembers. The bill amends provisions relating to both veterans and active members of the U.S.A.F., the U.S.A.F. Reserve, the National Guard, the United States Coast Guard, and the United States Coast Guard Reserve.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 295.124, 295.21, 295.22, 322.21, 379.354, and 394.47891.

This bill creates section 295.25 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.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.
