

# FLORIDA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## BILL ANALYSIS

*This bill analysis was prepared by nonpartisan committee staff and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.*

**BILL #:** [CS/HB 253](#)

**TITLE:** Dental Care for Veterans

**SPONSOR(S):** Edmonds

**COMPANION BILL:** [CS/CS/SB 96](#) (Sharief)

**LINKED BILLS:** None

**RELATED BILLS:** None

### Committee References

[Intergovernmental Affairs](#)

16 Y, 0 N, As CS



[Health Care Budget](#)

15 Y, 0 N



[State Affairs](#)

21 Y, 0 N

## SUMMARY

### **Effect of the Bill:**

The bill expands eligibility for the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program by providing explicit statutory authorization for the program to provide services to veterans with incomes of up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level.

### **Fiscal or Economic Impact:**

The grant program is limited to the funding appropriated in the General Appropriations Act (GAA), therefore there is no fiscal impact.

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## ANALYSIS

### **EFFECT OF THE BILL:**

The bill expands eligibility for the [Veterans Dental Care Grant Program](#) within the [Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs \(FDVA\)](#) by providing expressed statutory authorization for the program to provide services to veterans with incomes of up to 400 percent of the [federal poverty level](#). Current law does not establish an explicit income limitation for the program; however, FDVA has limited eligibility to veterans with incomes of up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level by rule. (Section [1](#))

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2026. (Section [2](#))

### **RULEMAKING:**

Section [295.157\(5\), F.S.](#), authorizes FDVA to adopt rules to administer the program. Under this authority, FDVA has limited eligibility for the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program to veterans with an income at or below 300 percent of the federal poverty level.<sup>1</sup>

*Lawmaking is a legislative power; however, the Legislature may delegate a portion of such power to executive branch agencies to create rules that have the force of law. To exercise this delegated power, an agency must have a grant of rulemaking authority and a law to implement.*

### **FISCAL OR ECONOMIC IMPACT:**

<sup>1</sup> R. 55-15.003(4), F.A.C.

**STATE GOVERNMENT:**

FDVA currently has recurring base funding of \$1,000,000 to support the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program, and will utilize this base funding to implement the provisions of this bill.

**PRIVATE SECTOR:**

Eligible veterans who may not otherwise qualify for or receive federal or state veteran dental care services may benefit financially from dental services provided by the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program as expanded by the bill.

**RELEVANT INFORMATION****SUBJECT OVERVIEW:****Federal Health Benefits for Veterans**

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides health care and related services through an integrated health care system with the Veterans Health Administration.<sup>2</sup> The federal government provides taxpayer-funded medical care to approximately 9 million veterans, including those with service-connected disabilities.<sup>3</sup> Federal veterans' health care benefits are generally available to a veteran who served for 24 continuous months in the active military, naval, or air service, or as a current or former member of the Reserves or the National Guard if those members were called to and completed active duty.<sup>4</sup> A veteran is not automatically enrolled in VA health care and must apply to receive health care services. To qualify, a person must have been discharged honorably. However, exceptions are made for veterans discharged for service-related disabilities. Additionally, a discharge upgrade or a VA Character of Discharge review may allow a person to be eligible for benefits.<sup>5</sup>

**VA Dental Care**

The VA provides dental care; however, the eligibility requirements are different than medical care. At the end of 2024, there were approximately 2 million enrolled veterans eligible for comprehensive dental care (24.3 percent of all enrolled veterans).<sup>6</sup> Generally, dental care is provided for a veteran who has a service-connected dental condition, is a former prisoner of war, or has a service-connected disability rating of 100 percent.<sup>7</sup> Eligibility for dental care is divided into six distinct classes.<sup>8</sup>

| Classification | Eligibility Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Scope of Treatment Provided                                                                     |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Class I        | Veteran has a service-connected compensable (i.e., disability compensation is paid) dental condition.                                                                                                                                                   | Any dental care and service needed regardless of relation to service-connected condition.       |
| Class II       | Veteran has a service-connected noncompensable dental condition (i.e., not subject to disability compensation) shown to have been in existence at the time of discharge or release from active duty service, which took place after September 30, 1981, | A one-time course of dental treatment of the service-connected noncompensable dental condition. |

<sup>2</sup> Dept. of Veterans Affairs, [Veterans Health Administration](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>3</sup> Dept. of Veterans Affairs, [Serving America's Veterans](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>4</sup> Dept. of Veterans Affairs, [Eligibility for VA Health Care](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> Dept. of Veterans Affairs, [FY 2026 Budget Submission](#), p. 88 (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>7</sup> Sidath Viranga Panangala & Jared S. Sussman, Cong. Research Serv., R42747, [Health Care for Veterans: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

| Classification | Eligibility Criteria                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Scope of Treatment Provided                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                | if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the veteran served at least 180 days (or 90 days if a veteran of the Gulf War era);</li> <li>the veteran's DD-214 does not bear certification that the veteran was provided, within 90 days immediately prior to discharge or release, a complete dental examination (including dental x-rays) and all appropriate dental treatment indicated by the examination to be needed; and</li> <li>application for treatment is received within 180 days of discharge.</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Class II(a)    | Veteran has a service-connected noncompensable dental condition or disability determined as resulting from combat wounds or service trauma.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | “Any dental care necessary to provide and maintain a functioning dentition. A Dental Trauma Rating (VA Form 10-564-D) or VA Regional Office Rating Decision letter (VA Form 10-7131) identifies the tooth/teeth/condition(s) that are trauma rated.” |
| Class II(b)    | Veteran is enrolled and may be homeless and receiving care for a period of 60 consecutive days in specified settings stipulated at 38 U.S.C. s. 2062.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | A one-time course of dental care that is determined clinically necessary to relieve pain, to help the veteran gain employment, or to “treat moderate, severe, or severe and complicated gingival and periodontal pathology.”                         |
| Class II(c)    | Veteran is a former prisoner of war (POW).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Any dental care and service needed regardless of relation to service-connected condition.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Class III      | Veteran has a dental condition clinically determined by VA to be aggravating a disability or condition from an associated service-connected condition or disability.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Dental care and services to treat such dental condition.                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Class IV       | Veteran whose service-connected disabilities have been rated at 100 percent or who is receiving the 100 percent rating by reason of individual unemployability.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Any dental care and service needed regardless of relation to service-connected condition.                                                                                                                                                            |
| Class V        | Veteran is actively engaged in a vocational rehabilitation program (38 U.S.C. Chapter 31).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Dental treatment clinically determined to achieve specific objectives.                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Class VI       | Veteran is receiving VA care or is scheduled for inpatient care and requires dental services for “a dental condition complicating a medical condition currently under treatment.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Outpatient dental care that is clinically necessary to treat “a dental condition complicating a medical condition currently under treatment.”                                                                                                        |

### Federal Poverty Guidelines

Federal poverty guidelines are annually updated.<sup>9</sup> Current guidelines for 2025 provide the following values for the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia:

| Persons in Family/Household | Poverty Guideline | 300%      | 400%      |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1                           | \$15,650          | \$46,950  | \$62,600  |
| 2                           | \$21,150          | \$63,450  | \$84,600  |
| 3                           | \$26,650          | \$79,950  | \$106,600 |
| 4                           | \$32,150          | \$96,450  | \$128,600 |
| 5                           | \$37,650          | \$112,950 | \$150,600 |
| 6                           | \$43,150          | \$129,450 | \$172,600 |

Various federal programs use the guidelines, or percentage multiples of the guidelines, in determining eligibility for certain benefits. Examples include Head Start, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the National School Lunch Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, and the Children's Health Insurance Program.<sup>10</sup>

### Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs

The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) was created to provide assistance to all former, present, and future members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their spouses and dependents in preparing claims for and securing compensation, hospitalization, career training, and other benefits or privileges to which they are, or may become entitled to under federal or state law or regulation by reason of their service in the U.S. Armed Forces.<sup>11</sup> There are about 1.4 million veterans living in Florida, making the state's veteran population the second largest nationally.<sup>12</sup>

#### *Florida Veterans Foundation*

The Florida Legislature authorized the FDVA to establish a direct-support organization (DSO) in 2008.<sup>13</sup> The DSO for the FDVA is a not-for-profit corporation organized and operated exclusively to obtain funds, such as grants, gifts, and bequests of money.<sup>14</sup> The DSO provides assistance and support to the FDVA, veterans, and congressionally-chartered veteran service organizations with subdivisions in the state.<sup>15</sup> The DSO operates under a written contract with the FDVA, is governed by a Board of Directors, and is subject to audit.<sup>16</sup>

The Florida Veterans Foundation (FVF) is the FDVA DSO. The FVF serves as the statewide lead organization for Florida veterans and their families by providing direct services and partnering with state and local governments, veteran service organizations, and educational institutions to improve their physical, financial, mental, emotional, and social well-being.<sup>17</sup> Current initiatives of the FVF include providing dental care to Florida's veterans and financial assistance to wounded and disabled veterans.<sup>18</sup>

### Veterans Dental Care Grant Program

The Veterans Dental Care Grant Program was established in 2023 within the FDVA to provide oral health care to

<sup>9</sup> See Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of the Asst. Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, [Poverty Guidelines](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026) and Dept. of Health and Human Services, [2024 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States \(all states except Alaska and Hawaii\)](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>10</sup> Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of the Asst. Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, [Poverty Guidelines](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>11</sup> [S. 292.05\(1\), F.S.](#)

<sup>12</sup> Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, [Our Veterans](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>13</sup> [Ch. 2008-84, s. 1 Laws of Fla.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [S. 292.055\(2\)\(b\)2., F.S.](#)

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> [S. 292.055\(3\), \(4\), and \(8\), F.S.](#)

<sup>17</sup> Florida Veterans Foundation, [About Florida Veterans Foundation](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>18</sup> Florida Veterans Foundation, [Public Service Announcement: Florida Veterans Foundation Launches Dental Program with First Grant Award to Wounded Veterans Relief Fund](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

veterans.<sup>19</sup> The FDVA contracts with the FVF, the FDVA's DSO, to administer the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program.<sup>20</sup> Statutory eligibility is limited to being a veteran residing in the state and having been honorably discharged from service or later upgraded to honorable.<sup>21</sup> FDVA, through rule, established the following eligibility criteria for services under the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program:

- Must have been issued a DD-214, NGB 22, or Certificate of Discharge.<sup>22</sup>
- Must reside in Florida.
- Must be at a 300 percent poverty level or below as defined by the federal government, at the time of application.
- Must be less than 100 percent service-connected disabled.
- Must not have a direct service-connected injury impacting his or her oral health.<sup>23</sup>

FDVA received \$1 million in recurring funds in the 2025-2026 General Appropriations Act for the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program.<sup>24</sup> FDVA must provide a quarterly report to the Executive Office of the Governor's Office of Policy and Budget, the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and the chair of the House of Representatives Budget Committee no later than 30 days after the last business day of each quarter. The report must include the number of veterans served, the type of services provided, and the cost of each service.<sup>25</sup> A veteran may apply online for the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program by filling out an application using the FVF Dental Service Locator.<sup>26</sup>

## BILL HISTORY

| COMMITTEE REFERENCE                                    | ACTION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | DATE      | STAFF<br>DIRECTOR/<br>POLICY CHIEF | ANALYSIS<br>PREPARED BY |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <a href="#">Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee</a> | 16 Y, 0 N, As CS                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1/14/2026 | Darden                             | Burgess                 |
| THE CHANGES ADOPTED BY THE COMMITTEE:                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removed provisions creating a new Veterans Dental Care Program in FDVA.</li> <li>• Revised the existing Veterans Dental Care Grant Program to expand eligibility to veterans with incomes of up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level.</li> </ul> |           |                                    |                         |
| <a href="#">Health Care Budget Subcommittee</a>        | 15 Y, 0 N                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 1/28/2026 | Clark                              | Day                     |
| <a href="#">State Affairs Committee</a>                | 21 Y, 0 N                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 2/17/2026 | Williamson                         | Burgess                 |

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**THIS BILL ANALYSIS HAS BEEN UPDATED TO INCORPORATE ALL OF THE CHANGES DESCRIBED ABOVE.**  
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<sup>19</sup> [S. 295.157\(3\), F.S.](#)

<sup>20</sup> [S. 295.157\(4\), F.S.](#)

<sup>21</sup> [S. 295.157\(2\)\(b\), F.S.](#)

<sup>22</sup> A NGB 22, like the DD-214, is a discharge document. A NGB 22 is a Report of Separation and Record of Service for the Departments of the Army and the Air Force National Guard Bureau. Dept. of Veterans Affairs, [Complete list of discharge documents](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).

<sup>23</sup> R. 55-15.003, F.A.C.

<sup>24</sup> [Ch. 2025-198, Laws of Fla.](#)

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> Florida Veterans Foundation, [Dental Service Locator](#) (last visited Jan. 23, 2026).