

Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office; Sub. for HB 2681

Sub. for HB 2681 abolishes the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs (KCVA), creates the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office (KCVAO) and the Veterans Claims Assistance Program, and makes other changes relating to the transfer and establishment of powers, duties, and functions.

Agency Organization

Under the provisions of the bill, all powers, duties, and functions are transferred to the KCVAO effective July 1, 2014. The KCVAO is responsible for providing services and support to veterans and their relatives and dependents, along with managing and operating the Kansas Soldiers' Home and the Kansas Veterans' Home.

The KCVAO is administered by a Director appointed by the Governor and subject to confirmation by the Kansas Senate. Additionally, the Director is required to be a veteran. The bill also authorizes the Director to appoint and oversee, subject to approval by the Governor, the following:

- Superintendent of the Kansas Soldiers' Home;
- Superintendent of the Kansas Veterans' Home; and
- Deputy Director of Veterans Services.

Annual Reporting Requirement

The bill requires the Director of the KCVAO to annually prepare and submit a written report to both the House Committee on Veterans, Military and Homeland Security and the Office of the Governor. The first report is to be submitted on or before the first day of the 2015 Legislative Session. Under the provisions of the bill, the report will include the following:

- Progress made by the KCVAO and its director in response to recommendations made by the Legislative Division of Post Audit in the preceding fiscal year;
- Information on the current financial procedures implemented by the KCVAO at the Kansas Veterans' Home and the Kansas Soldiers' Home;
- Information on the current residential care services provided for veterans at both facilities; and
- Recommendations for any necessary legislation required to ensure the State of Kansas is providing the necessary services and care for Kansas veterans.

Veterans Claims Assistance Program

The bill abolishes the Veterans Claims Assistance Advisory Board and replaces the Advisory Board with the Veterans Claims Assistance Program (VCAP). The purposes of the new program include the following:

- Improve the coordination of veterans benefits counseling in Kansas;
- Ensure taxpayer dollars are used efficiently and effectively;
- Ensure every veteran is served and receives the necessary counseling and assistance; and
- Advise the Director of the KCVAO on all veterans services, including the VCAP.

The Deputy Director of Veterans Services will be a permanent member of the VCAP and serve as chairperson of its new advisory board.

Veterans Claims Assistance Program Advisory Board

The Veterans Claims Assistance Program Advisory Board advises the Director of the KCVAO about veterans' services, including the VCAP. The new board replaces the Veterans Claims Assistance Advisory Board. The new advisory board consists of at least seven members as follows:

- The Deputy Director of Veterans Services will be a permanent member of the advisory board and will serve as chairperson of the advisory board;
- A member of each veterans service organization participating in the grant program;
- Two representatives appointed by the Governor. Both appointees must be veterans. Also, any veterans service organization may submit a list of three names for consideration by the Governor and the Governor must consider each list and may appoint an individual from among those listed;
- Two legislators, one from each house, with the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate each appointing a member. Under the provisions of the bill, one legislator must be a member of the Democratic Party and one legislator must be a member of the Republican Party.

Additionally, if there were fewer than two veterans service organizations participating in the grant program, the Governor will be required to appoint the remaining members of the advisory board; however, appointments under this provision would not be allowed to exceed two members.

Veterans' Funds

The bill eliminates a requirement that any member's (veteran's) funds in excess of \$5,000 be deposited with the State Treasurer for safekeeping. Members are permitted to use those funds for their personal use, benefit, and burial. Additionally, the bill requires the Director of the KCVAO to designate an individual at both the Kansas Soldiers' Home and the Kansas Veterans' Home to oversee the funds.