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**AB-1566 Department of Veterans Affairs: veterans' services.** (2023-2024)

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Date Published: 10/12/2023 02:00 PM

**Assembly Bill No. 1566**

**CHAPTER 694**

An act to amend Sections 972.1 and 974 of the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans.

[ Approved by Governor October 10, 2023. Filed with Secretary of State October 10, 2023. ]

**LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST**

AB 1566, Soria. Department of Veterans Affairs: veterans' services.

Existing law requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to disburse funds, appropriated to the department for the purpose of supporting county veterans service officers pursuant to the annual Budget Act, on a pro rata basis, to a county that complies with certain conditions. Existing law requires the department to prepare an annual report of the activities of county veterans services officers, including the number of claims filed to receive pension benefits and a summary of other services provided by county veterans service officers.

This bill would require the department's annual report to include the composition of staff at the county office, as specified, and the annual funding of the county veterans service office by the county, as specified. This bill would authorize the department to require county veterans service officers to apply uniform measurement and workload units, claims, and other information.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

**THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:**

**SECTION 1.** Section 972.1 of the Military and Veterans Code is amended to read:

**972.1.** (a) The sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) is hereby appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Veterans Affairs for allocation, during the 1989–90 fiscal year, for purposes of funding the activities of county veterans service officers pursuant to this section. Funds for allocation in future years shall be as provided in the annual Budget Act.

(b) Funds shall be disbursed each fiscal year on a pro rata basis to counties that have established and maintain a county veterans service officer in accordance with the staffing level and workload of each county veterans service officer under a formula based upon performance that shall be developed by the Department of Veterans Affairs for these purposes, and that shall allocate county funds in any fiscal year for county veterans service officers in an amount not less than the amount allocated in the 1988–89 fiscal year.

(c) The department shall annually determine the amount of new or increased monetary benefits paid to eligible veterans by the federal government attributable to the assistance of county veterans service officers. The department shall, on or before October 1 of each year, prepare and transmit its determination for the preceding fiscal year to the Department of Finance and the

Legislature. The Department of Finance shall review the department's determination in time to use the information in the annual Budget Act for the budget of the department for the next fiscal year.

(d) (1) The Legislature finds and declares that 50 percent of the amount annually budgeted for county veterans service officers is approximately eleven million dollars (\$11,000,000). The Legislature further finds and declares that it is an efficient and reasonable use of state funds to increase the annual budget for county veterans service officers if it is justified by the monetary benefits to the state's veterans attributable to the effort of these officers.

(2) It is the intent of the Legislature, after reviewing the department's determination in subdivision (c), to consider an increase in the annual budget for county veterans service officers in an amount not to exceed five million dollars (\$5,000,000), if the monetary benefits to the state's veterans attributable to the assistance of county veteran service officers justify that increase in the budget.

**SEC. 2.** Section 974 of the Military and Veterans Code is amended to read:

**974.** (a) The Department of Veterans Affairs shall annually prepare a report of the activities of county veterans service officers, and may require each county veterans service officer to submit information required to prepare the report. The report shall include the following:

(1) The number of veterans and their family members who have contacted or utilized the services of the county veterans service offices during the fiscal year.

(2) The number of claims filed to achieve benefits such as pension, disability compensation, and health care on behalf of veterans and their dependents.

(3) The annualized monetary value of benefits received by veterans and their dependents as a result of the efforts of county veterans service offices, broken down by type of benefit.

(4) A summary of other services provided by county veterans service offices and special events and activities in which county veterans service offices participated, such as veterans outreach events, homeless veteran "Stand Downs," and job fairs for veterans.

(5) The composition of the county office, including the number of staff, and how many are administrative, clerical, or directly supporting claims filed on behalf of veterans.

(6) The annual funding of the county veterans service office by the county, including year-to-year changes and funding over the previous five years.

(b) The information required to be included in paragraphs (1) to (3), inclusive, of subdivision (a) shall be set forth for each county together with a statewide total.

(c) For purposes of implementing this section, the department may require county veterans service officers to apply uniform measurement and workload units, claims, and other information required by the department under this section.

(d) The department shall transmit a copy of the report to the Department of Finance, the State Department of Health Care Services, the California Veterans Board, and to each Member of the Legislature.