



## **82nd Session Select Interim Charges Relating to Veterans Affairs and Military Installations**

November 10, 2011

### **Veteran Affairs and Military Installations Committee**

- Study the employment rate of Texas veterans, and consider ways to better coordinate federal, state, local and private resources to enhance employment services. Examine the transfer of Veteran Employment Services (VES) from the Texas Workforce Commission to the Texas Veterans Commission, and include an assessment of the impact on Texas veterans and their families. Make recommendations for improving services and possible expansion of services to potential additional returning veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.
- Review the benefits claims process for filing with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs through the Texas Veterans Commission's Claims Representation and Counseling program and make recommendations to improve the quality of life for veterans and their families. Coordinate with the Senate Finance Committee to identify and maximize funding options, reduce claims backlogs, and increase the benefits received by Texas veterans.
- Examine methods to support veteran participation in higher education. Examine the use of the Hazlewood Act by Texas veterans, and include recommendations to maximize programs to effectively serve veterans and their families. Determine the efficacy of establishing Veteran Resource Centers at institutions of higher education to assist in student veteran academic achievement, provide additional funding for institutions from increased Montgomery GI Bill revenue, and better integrate veterans on college campuses.
- Evaluate the status of mental health services for veterans and Texas Military Forces. Include an assessment of peer counseling programs, "aftercare" provided for units within their local communities following a trauma within the group, and efforts to address the secondary mental health and substance abuse issues caused by post traumatic stress disorders and other combat-related disorders.
- Consider establishing a "Commander's Council" in conjunction with the Office of the Governor's Texas Military Preparedness Commission, to allow commanders of Texas' military forces and installations to better coordinate and communicate with the Texas Legislature and state leadership. Develop a comprehensive communication plan with Texas military installations, and recommend any legislative initiatives necessary to support the installations, active-duty service members and their families on and around the installations, and the partnerships between the defense community and the community within which the military installations reside.

- Study the appropriate role of Texas state military forces in enhancing the safety of all Texans, and make recommendations for improving the coordination, accountability, and effectiveness of all components of our state military forces, including the national, state, and air guards. Identify limitations on the forces providing border security and other operations, and make recommendations for better coordination with federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. (Joint Charge with the Transportation & Homeland Security Committee)
- Study the use and impact of Veterans Courts throughout Texas. Make recommendations relating to potential funding sources, staffing requirements, additional direct services not provided by the Veterans Administration, and possible expansion.
- Monitor the implementation of legislation addressed by the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs & Military Installations, 82nd Legislature, Regular and Called Sessions, and make recommendations for any legislation needed to improve, enhance, and/or complete implementation. Specifically, monitor the following:
  - the "College Credit for Heroes" program as administered by the Texas Workforce Commission;
  - the administration of the Veterans Housing Assistance Program by the Texas Veterans Commission's Fund for Veterans' Assistance; and
  - the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services, authorized by SB 1796, 82nd Regular Legislation Session.