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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-SECOND SESSION

H. F. No. 4335

03/17/2022 Authored by Edelson and Ecklund
The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Labor, Industry, Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy

1.1 A bill for an act
1.2 relating to veterans affairs; establishing veterans service organization grant program;
1.3 appropriating money for veterans service organization grant program; amending
1.4 Laws 2021, First Special Session chapter 12, article 1, section 37, subdivision 2;
1.5 proposing coding for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 197.

1.6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.7 Section 1. 197.61 VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS GRANT PROGRAM.

1.8 Subdivision 1. Grant program. A veterans service organization grant program is
1.9 established to provide grants to congressionally chartered veterans service organizations
1.10 (VSO) to enhance the effectiveness of veterans services. The program shall be administered
1.11 by the commissioner of veterans affairs.

1.12 Subd. 2. Definitions. (a) For purposes of this section, the following terms have the
1.13 meanings given them.

1.14 (b) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs or
1.15 designee.

1.16 (c) "Department" means the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1.17 (d) "Congressionally chartered veterans service organizations" are organizations that
1.18 have been granted charters by Congress through the enactment of public laws. Each
1.19 congressionally chartered VSO is listed in United States Code, title 36, subtitle II: Patriotic
1.20 and National Organizations.

1.21 (e) "VA" means the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

2.1 (f) "Accredited representation" means providing representation under the authority
2.2 granted by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to representatives, agents,
2.3 and attorneys to assist claimants in the preparation, presentation, and prosecution of claims
2.4 for VA benefits.

2.5 (g) "Full member" means a veteran who meets the requirements for membership in a
2.6 congressionally chartered veterans service organization and is entitled to all of the rights
2.7 and privileges thereof. Full member does not include an associate or auxiliary member.

2.8 Subd. 3. **Eligibility.** To be eligible for a grant under subdivision 6, a veterans service
2.9 organization must provide:

2.10 (1) accredited representation for the preparation and presentation of veteran claims to
2.11 the United States government for compensation and other benefits to which a veteran is
2.12 entitled as a result of the veteran's military service;

2.13 (2) a state or department level veterans service officer to provide programs and services
2.14 to veterans; or

2.15 (3) statewide transportation services to veterans.

2.16 Subd. 4. **Grant process.** (a) A grant may be used only for the purpose of enhancing the
2.17 operations of congressionally chartered veterans service organizations.

2.18 (b) The commissioner shall provide a list of qualifying uses for grant expenditures as
2.19 required in subdivision 5 and shall approve a grant for a qualifying use if there is sufficient
2.20 grant money remaining in the grant program to cover the full amount of the grant.

2.21 Subd. 5. **Qualifying uses.** The commissioner shall develop a list of qualifying uses for
2.22 grants awarded under this section.

2.23 Subd. 6. **Grant amount.** (a) Each congressionally chartered veterans service organization
2.24 is eligible to receive an annual grant determined by the commissioner as follows:

2.25 (1) a dollar amount per full member for each organization member to be established by
2.26 the commissioner. The dollar amount may be adjusted every biennium, subject to available
2.27 funding; and

2.28 (2) a dollar amount for each organization, established by the commissioner, based on
2.29 the organization's share of the VA claims workload for veterans and their dependents who
2.30 reside in Minnesota. The VA claims workload must be reported as a percentage of the state's
2.31 total VA workload.

3.1 (b) The VA claims workload for each congressionally chartered veterans service
 3.2 organization must be determined by a report supplied by the VA, as adopted by the
 3.3 commissioner.

3.4 Subd. 7. **Recapture.** If a congressionally chartered veterans service organization fails
 3.5 to use the grant for a qualified use approved by the commissioner or does not spend the
 3.6 allocated grant money, the commissioner shall seek recovery of the grant from the
 3.7 organization and the organization must repay the grant amount or any unused grant money.

3.8 Sec. 2. Laws 2021, First Special Session chapter 12, article 1, section 37, subdivision 2,
 3.9 is amended to read:

3.10		<u>27,073,000</u>	<u>22,153,000</u>
3.11	Subd. 2. Veterans Programs and Services	<u>27,220,000</u>	<u>22,300,000</u>

3.12 (a) **CORE Program.** \$750,000 each year is
 3.13 for the Counseling and Case Management
 3.14 Outreach Referral and Education (CORE)
 3.15 program.

3.16 (b) **Veterans Service Organizations Grant**
 3.17 **Program.** ~~\$353,000~~ \$500,000 each year is for
 3.18 grants to ~~the following~~ congressionally
 3.19 chartered veterans service organizations
 3.20 meeting eligibility requirements under
 3.21 Minnesota Statutes, section 197.61,
 3.22 subdivision 3, as designated by the
 3.23 ~~commissioner: Disabled American Veterans,~~
 3.24 ~~Military Order of the Purple Heart, the~~
 3.25 ~~American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars,~~
 3.26 ~~Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, and~~
 3.27 ~~Paralyzed Veterans of America. This funding~~
 3.28 ~~must be allocated in direct proportion to the~~
 3.29 ~~funding currently being provided by the~~
 3.30 ~~commissioner to these organizations.~~

3.31 (c) **Minnesota Assistance Council for**
 3.32 **Veterans.** \$750,000 each year is for a grant
 3.33 to the Minnesota Assistance Council for
 3.34 Veterans to provide assistance throughout

4.1 Minnesota to veterans and their families who
4.2 are homeless or in danger of homelessness,
4.3 including assistance with the following:

- 4.4 (1) utilities;
4.5 (2) employment; and
4.6 (3) legal issues.

4.7 The assistance authorized under this paragraph
4.8 must be made only to veterans who have
4.9 resided in Minnesota for 30 days prior to
4.10 application for assistance and according to
4.11 other guidelines established by the
4.12 commissioner. In order to avoid duplication
4.13 of services, the commissioner must ensure that
4.14 this assistance is coordinated with all other
4.15 available programs for veterans.

4.16 **(d) State's Veterans Cemeteries.** \$6,172,000
4.17 the first year and \$1,672,000 the second year
4.18 are for the state's veterans cemeteries. Of these
4.19 amounts, \$4,500,000 the first year is to
4.20 construct and equip the new veterans cemetery
4.21 in Redwood Falls.

4.22 **(e) Honor Guards.** \$200,000 each year is for
4.23 compensation for honor guards at the funerals
4.24 of veterans under Minnesota Statutes, section
4.25 197.231.

4.26 **(f) Minnesota GI Bill.** \$200,000 each year is
4.27 for the costs of administering the Minnesota
4.28 GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits,
4.29 on-the-job training, and apprenticeship
4.30 program under Minnesota Statutes, section
4.31 197.791.

4.32 **(g) Gold Star Program.** \$100,000 each year
4.33 is for administering the Gold Star Program for

5.1 surviving family members of deceased
5.2 veterans.

5.3 **(h) County Veterans Service Office.**

5.4 \$1,100,000 each year is for funding the
5.5 County Veterans Service Office grant program
5.6 under Minnesota Statutes, section 197.608.

5.7 **(i) Veteran Homelessness Initiative.**

5.8 \$3,165,000 each year is for an initiative to
5.9 prevent and end veteran homelessness. The
5.10 commissioner of veterans affairs may provide
5.11 housing vouchers and other services to
5.12 alleviate homelessness among veterans and
5.13 former service members in Minnesota. The
5.14 commissioner may contract for program
5.15 administration and may establish a vacancy
5.16 reserve fund. The base for this appropriation
5.17 in fiscal year 2024 and each year thereafter is
5.18 \$1,311,000.

5.19 **(j) Camp Bliss.** \$75,000 each year is for a

5.20 grant to Independent Lifestyles, Inc. for
5.21 expenses related to retreats for veterans at
5.22 Camp Bliss in Walker, Minnesota, including
5.23 therapy, transportation, and activities
5.24 customized for veterans.

5.25 **(k) Veterans On The Lake.** \$50,000 in the

5.26 first year is for a grant to Veterans on the Lake
5.27 for expenses related to retreats for veterans,
5.28 including therapy, transportation, and activities
5.29 customized for veterans.

5.30 **(l) Veterans Resilience Project.** \$400,000

5.31 each year is for a grant to the veterans
5.32 resilience project. Grant funds must be used
5.33 to make eye movement desensitization and
5.34 reprocessing therapy available to veterans and

6.1 current military service members who are
6.2 suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder
6.3 and trauma. The base for this appropriation in
6.4 fiscal year 2024 and each year thereafter is
6.5 \$200,000.

6.6 The veterans resilience project must report to
6.7 the commissioner of veterans affairs and the
6.8 chairs and ranking minority members of the
6.9 legislative committees with jurisdiction over
6.10 veterans affairs policy and finance by January
6.11 15 of each year on the program. The report
6.12 must include an overview of the program's
6.13 budget, a detailed explanation of program
6.14 expenditures, the number of veterans and
6.15 service members served by the program, and
6.16 a list and explanation of the services provided
6.17 to program participants.

6.18 **(m) 9/11 Task Force.** \$500,000 the first year
6.19 is for the Advisory Task Force on 9/11 and
6.20 Global War on Terrorism Remembrance. The
6.21 task force must collect, memorialize, and
6.22 publish stories of Minnesotans' service in the
6.23 Global War on Terrorism and impacts on their
6.24 dependents. The task force must host a
6.25 remembrance program in September 2021.
6.26 This is a onetime appropriation.