

**Governor's Committee to Support the Military  
Initiative / Issues Update - 2020**

**GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT THE MILITARY  
2020 REPORT**

**Background**

On September 5, 2018, Governor Abbott issued an Executive Order establishing the Governor's Committee to Support the Military (Committee) because Texas is intricately linked to the U.S. military forces. With 15 military installations, over \$123.7 billion in output, and almost \$40 billion in disposable personal income, the U.S. military is one of Texas' largest industries. Additionally, many Texans serve in the military both at home and abroad, plus a significant number of veterans choose to call Texas home. A 2018 study by the Council on Foreign Relations showed Texas had the second-largest number of enlisted recruits. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs showed over 1.6 million veterans resided in Texas as of September 2015, which is the second largest population of veterans in the United States. As such, it is important the state collaborates with the U.S. military to ensure the mutually beneficial partnership continues.

On January 23, 2019, the Committee issued its report with findings and thirteen recommendations across three categories of Education, Healthcare, and Quality of Life; Workforce Development; and Encroachment and Infrastructure. You may read the full 2018 report at

[https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/Governors\\_Committee\\_to\\_Support\\_the\\_Military\\_2018\\_Report\\_01232019.docx](https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/press/Governors_Committee_to_Support_the_Military_2018_Report_01232019.docx).

The Committee's recommendations resulted in a combination of policy, legislative, and executive actions designed to maintain and enhance the military value of Texas' installations and improve the quality of life and opportunities for military families. Through the partnership of the Governor and the Legislature, the state made tremendous progress on the recommendations in the report. For example, several recommendations from the report were passed by the Legislature and signed into law by the Governor:

- SB 1200 allows a military spouse to practice in the state if they hold a license that is substantially equivalent in another state.
- HB 1597 established residency for purposes of enrolling in an open enrollment charter school for children of military members upon the military member receiving a transfer order to an installation in the school's attendance zone.
- HB 1 expanded the appropriation for the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program from \$40 to \$50 million for the biennium.
- HB 2530 created an online repository of information of use to active duty military families relocating to Texas.

Another recommendation was enacted through policy actions:

- Displaying on the TEA homepage a prominent link to the agency's Military Family Resource page.

Even with the progress made, Texas must remain cognizant of the constantly evolving defense, economic, political, and technological environments that may put pressure on or create risk for our installations and the Texas defense industry. Through its proactive approach, Texas will turn

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risk into opportunity. This report serves as an update to the 2018 report and makes the following observations and recommendations.

### **Committee Findings and Recommendations**

The findings and recommendations are grouped by the three subcommittee categories of Education, Healthcare, and Quality of Life; Workforce Development; and Encroachment and Infrastructure. The Auxiliary Military Spouse Task Force recommendations, a group also created by the Governor's September 5, 2018 Executive Order, are included within these subcommittee categories but are not broken out separately. The Spouse Task Force enhanced Committee recommendations by providing additional specificity which has been incorporated into and improved the overall recommendations. Each recommendation is meant to support the Committee's charter to maintain and enhance the military value of Texas' military installations; make Texas more attractive for future military missions; as well as enhance the lives of service members and their families. These actions will improve the state's position for any future Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions and stationing decisions for new missions or capabilities.

#### Education, Health Care, and Quality of Life

##### **1. Military Child Education Coalition**

**Background:** The Coalition is a national non-profit organization whose goal is to ensure quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation, and transition. They provide many services and connections to services for military families and is an important addition to serving military families in Texas.

**Finding:** Appropriated funding for the Military Child Education Coalition is not currently included in the base appropriation budget for TEA. Instead, it is added through annual emergency funding. During the last legislative session, funding was included in the TEA Budget.

**Recommendation:** Moving forward continue to ensure the funding is appropriated by the legislature to the TEA budget for the current \$500,000 biennium funding for the Military Child Education Coalition in the TEA's base appropriation request.

##### **2. Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)**

**Background:** Under the A-F accountability system, Texas schools are held accountable to the rate at which they graduate students who meet the criteria for College, Career & Military Readiness (CCMR). By including military enlistment in the accountability data, Texas has represented a strong support for military families and emphasized the importance of the military as a viable career option for 320,000 Texas high school graduates every year.

For the college and career measures, the TEA and school districts have access to data which includes which university a student attends and if they received a certification. However, since the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) serves under the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Texas schools do not have access to the data DMDC collects on how many Texans enlist for military service and what school district they attend. Instead, school districts must collect enlistment information on a voluntary basis. This creates a burden on districts and also weakens the importance of the military readiness indicator for districts.

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Data from the DMDC will provide Texas with accurate data that can be incorporated into the accountability system and will encourage the continued emphasis on military enlistment after graduation.

**Finding:** Texas' ability to track and evaluate student preparation for military service is hampered by a lack of data. If data were shared, Texas schools could share best practices and programs that help create military ready students. HB3 by the 86<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature includes achievement of CCMR standards and provides incentives for those school districts and teachers who meet CCMR standards. This further highlights the need for accurate reporting of Texas high school graduates who enlist in the military. To date, TEA attempts to access DMDC data have not been successful.

**Recommendation:** Continue to pursue options for receiving DMDC data and establishment of a reporting process for annual or semi-annual report that allows TEA to measure the Military Readiness component of CCMR. This may include development of a data sharing agreement between DMDC and TEA. Continue to work with federal partners to encourage data sharing between the Defense Manpower Data Center and the Texas Education Agency.

### **3. Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children**

**Background:** Texas is part of the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children. The Compact exists to strengthen transitions and close education gaps as children of military families move to a new school district in other states. All 50 states and the District of Columbia are part of the Compact. Examples of problems the Compact has helped to address include:

- If entrance age requirements are different, children may continue in the same grade if they have already started kindergarten or first grade;
- Children are allowed to move up to first or second grade, regardless of age requirements, if they have completed kindergarten or first grade in another state;
- If a student moves during the senior year and the receiving state is unable to make the necessary accommodations for required courses and exit exams, the two school districts must work together to obtain a diploma from the sending school so the student can graduate on time; and
- Students may request additional, excused absences to visit with their parent or legal guardian immediately before, during, and after deployment.

**Finding:** TEA does not currently have authority in statute to establish a state council to address issues that might arise with regard to education for transitioning military families and to share best practices across states. For example, one issue the Compact considered in the last year was whether the Compact required a charter school, which ordinarily requires families to apply through a school lottery, to make preferences for children of military families for admission. In the coming year, the Compact will be revisiting their strategic plan and it would be beneficial to have the expertise of a council to provide input on behalf of Texas. The Department of Defense has made it a goal to make sure each state has a functioning state council.

**Recommendation:** Renew efforts to amend Chapter 162 of the Texas Education Code to allow for the establishment of a state council for the Military Compact and incorporate input

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from military families and best practices from other states in determining who should be a member of the council.

### **4. Connecting Veterans and Active-Duty Personnel to Services**

**Background:** Texas offers significant resources across federal, state, regional, and local levels from governmental, non-profit, and volunteer agencies to support military service members, veterans, and family members with financial, medical, legal, workforce, and education challenges. However, there is not a comprehensive method of tracking or enabling service referrals and outcomes. A traditional model of service delivery involves providing a resource directory to the person in need of services, leaving them to navigate a complex web of providers and eligibility requirements.

**Findings:** No comprehensive method exists of tracking or enabling service referrals for veterans in need of specialized services from the wide variety of veteran support organizations. This produces inefficiencies and does not allow veterans to easily receive the full compendium of available services. Expansion of the TXServes program has not been accomplished since the last report. However, the Texas Legislature passed HB2530 directing establishment of an online repository for information related to military servicemembers and family members which is on the Texas Veterans Portal at <https://veterans.portal.texas.gov/licenses/>.

**Recommendation:** Continue to seek a comprehensive information solution to inform and assist military servicemembers and family members that provides navigation through the vast breadth of services available but also tracks actions taken and solutions to highlight and identify both successful programs and gaps in services. TXServes is a viable initiative currently operating in San Antonio and in North Texas, which utilizes a web-based application to intake, assess, refer, and track services. The program maintains a single point of entry into the system and digital referral network which can link service providers and programs to make them more accessible and the delivery of services more efficient while reducing the burden on the user of services to navigate a difficult system. Explore expanding TXServes or a similar results-oriented tracking system in communities across the state to achieve as much coverage as possible that utilizes a web-based case management system. Such a system would help make Texas a national model for service delivery to our military members, military families, and veterans.

### **5. Mitigate the Impact of Lost Property Tax Revenue Due to the Disabled Veterans Residence Homestead Exemption**

**Background:** In 2009 Texas enacted a 100% property tax exemption for Disabled Veterans with a 100% disability rating in recognition of veteran's service and sacrifice. Over time, this unfunded mandate has created significant losses in city and county tax revenue. Additionally, some cities with a high disabled veteran population are not eligible for reimbursement by the state due to restrictions in current law. This loss in revenue has a negative impact on the quality of life surrounding those installations. Local jurisdictions only recourse is to either increase taxes and fees or reduce services. For example, Cibolo, Harker Heights, Killeen, and others have lost significant amounts of revenue due to do this exemption. Revenue losses are not fully reimbursed by the state, or in the case of Harker Heights and Cibolo receive not reimbursed at all. The loss of revenue negatively affects local services and infrastructure impacting quality of life in

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these jurisdictions.<sup>1</sup> Recent Department of Defense stationing decisions include evaluation criteria for quality of life. As we move towards the next version of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC), quality of life issues in local communities will be an important metric for scoring an installation. The disabled veterans' tax exemption impact on local services and infrastructure potentially negatively affect the installation score for BRAC actions as well as new mission stationing decisions.

**Findings:** The disabled veterans' tax exemption is creating unintended, negative consequences on the quality of life for some local communities. Efforts to highlight, educate, and discuss the topic in search of a solution should continue. We must work to mitigate the resource impact to communities around military installations to prevent negative effects to Quality of Life, which is a DoD evaluation criterion for stationing decisions for missions and units. DoD stationing decisions are highly competitive processes. Installations and their communities must put their best face forward to successfully compete, which requires resources. The potential negative resource impact on community Quality of Life may disadvantage communities during these competitions.

**Recommendation:** The Legislature should continue to explore options to mitigate the negative resource impact on communities and provide aid to communities that are disproportionately impacted.

### Workforce Development

#### 6. Increase Integration Between Texas Educational Providers and Military Installation/Industry Skill Requirements

**Background:** Military installations (bases, depots, facilities) and related industries in Texas frequently struggle to maintain civilian workforces with required skills in advanced manufacturing and technology. Additionally, as members of the military transition to civilian life, finding ways to integrate their military experience into the private sector is important.

**Finding:** Texas has a shortage of individuals with the knowledge and experience to work in advanced manufacturing and technology-based industries that support the military. Military related industry and DoD Installations employ thousands of Texas civilians in well-paying jobs.

**Recommendation:** Encourage high schools, technical and community colleges, and universities to invest in programs that support the growing advanced manufacturing and technology demands, which may include working with military installations and related industries in Texas to promote awareness of these demands in the workforce.

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<sup>1</sup>KXXV.com. September 12, 2018. "Cities Impacted by Homestead Exemption for Disabled Veterans are Asking State for Additional Funding." Retrieved on December 17, 2018, from <http://www.kxxv.com/story/39078155/cities-impacted-by-homestead-exemption-for-disabled-veterans-are-asking-state-for-additional-funding>.

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Require TEA to consider the needs of Texas military bases and military industry in their discussions on programs of study for the purpose of Federal Perkins Alignment. Require the agency to consider the impact of programs of study on the needs of Texas military related employers and align educational programs with these needs. Encourage TEA to review the option of requiring school districts surrounding a military base to offer courses in a program of study that could lead to employment by students on base at graduation. In addition, encourage the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to conduct a similar process within their current rulemaking authority with local institutions of higher education.

### Encroachment and Infrastructure

#### 7. Interagency Contracts between TxDOT and the Military

**Background:** The roads within military installations are not on the state highway system, and thus are not serviced or maintained by TxDOT. Road improvements on military installations are paid for with federal funds from the Department of Defense (DoD) separate from TxDOT transportation funding received from the US Department of Transportation (USDOT). Currently, TxDOT does not have statutory authority to enter into agreements with military installations to assist or coordinate in the provision of road services.

**Findings:** TxDOT's tremendous expertise in transportation is not allowed to benefit military installations in Texas. If TxDOT were allowed to enter into agreements to provide their expertise to military installations, these installations could contract with TxDOT to provide the maintenance, improvement, relocation, or extension of existing roads reducing costs for the military installations and improve base infrastructure while improving integration of TxDOT and installation transportation networks. The military installations would still pay for any work performed on installation with TxDOT providing the expertise. Deployability is an important DoD metric during Base Realignment and Closure evaluations. Improvements to the installation transportation network integrated into the TxDOT transportation network will improve installation scores.

**Recommendation:** Continue to pursue legislative changes which allow for TxDOT to enter into interagency agreements or contracts with military installations for the maintenance, improvement, relocation, or extension of existing roads on the installation. Ensure that state legislators understand this is a no cost service to the state because federal DoD funding will still pay for any on installation projects. The legislation simply allows the federal military installations to use the significant expertise of TxDOT to improve the transportation network and military value of the installation. Emphasize these services do not consume TxDOT transportation funding provided through USDOT.

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### **8. Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) Program**

**Background:** The DEAAG program is an invaluable resource to Texas' military installations and communities. It provides cost share funding to improve the military value of military installations while setting the conditions to prepare for future BRAC actions. It also has a significant return on investment for the state. Over the last three biennia, \$83 million was appropriated to the Texas Military Preparedness Commission for the purposes of providing DEAAG grants. Those funds were awarded to a total of thirty (30) projects benefiting fifteen (15) installations surrounding communities with a combined return on investment of \$204M to the state.

**Findings:** The DEAAG program is a proactive effort by the Governor and Legislature to enhance the military value of military installations in Texas, and that program has proven very successful. The assistance provided is translated into greater military value, which ultimately provides significant positive economic effects on local communities and the state. Furthermore, the DEAAG program is a helpful tool as Texas prepares for a future round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) and/or stationing decisions for new missions and capabilities.

**Recommendation:** Fully fund the DEAAG program to \$30M to help enhance military installations in Texas while improving and protecting those installations and surrounding communities from potential negative impacts of a future BRAC or stationing decision. The DEAAG program's 247% Return on Investment (ROI) demonstrates its efficacy and contributions to the communities, the installations, and the state.

### **9. Encroachment on Military Training**

**Background:** Military training capabilities remain particularly susceptible to encroachment from off-base infrastructure developments which may negatively impact training including aviation, ground maneuver, and electromagnetic spectrum capabilities. To illustrate this point, military aviation training capabilities are particularly susceptible to encroachment from wind energy developments. Military aviation training requires the ability to conduct low-level flights down to 200 feet above ground level flight training during periods of limited visibility with night vision systems. The next generation of military aircraft in development will require at least the same capability for training at low-level at speeds that are 2-3 times faster than current aircraft. While negative impacts to training routes are a concern, additional concerns exist with regard to potential threats to national security. Military installations in Texas are not just a benefit to the state; they also help secure the nation. The previous round of BRAC heavily weighted training capability as part of an installation evaluation, and future BRAC evaluations will continue to emphasize training capabilities. The last encroachment protection enacted was by the 85th Texas Legislature with Senate Bill 277 which prohibited Chapter 313 tax subsidies and abatements for wind energy projects within 25 nautical miles of the boundaries of fixed-wing military aviation facilities. However, we must continue to be proactive and vigilant while protecting property rights.

**Finding:** Failure to protect installation and aviation training areas from encroachment creates a risk for retention of current military missions. If an aviation training area is deemed unusable due to encroachment, the military installation may also be deemed unusable by DoD. We must take a critical look at current encroachment provisions to ensure military training areas remain viable or risk potential loss of missions and associated units. Additionally, any threat to national security interests within the state of Texas must be identified and deterred.

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**Recommendation:** Texas should consider additional protections against deliberate impacts of encroachment on military training areas to include encroachment that may pose a national security threat. Protections must balance individual property rights and the need for legislation or policy changes which strengthens the state's protections against encroachment, including commercial development. This includes adding prohibitions against 313 subsidies that may impact military aviation training areas and military training routes located outside military installation boundaries.

**Consider adding** the following language in Sec. 397 of Texas Local Government Code: Sec. 397.001 Definitions.

“Compatible use area” means an area or district in close enough proximity to affect the operations associated with a military base, defense facility, or military training or operating area including military aviation routes and airspace designated by the most recent compatible use studies, plans, and applicable regulations.

“Military operating area” means an area where military operations are present and include but are not limited to training areas, aviation routes, and airspace.

### Section 397.005

#### COORDINATION WITH MILITARY BASE OR DEFENSE FACILITY OR MILITARY AUTHORITIES.

To help ensure the safety of Texans and the conduct of safe military operations in the state, any entity planning to develop or use land or airspace in a compatible use area shall contact the defense community, as defined in Sec. 397.001(2), to coordinate compatibility prior to beginning development or use. Defense communities shall facilitate compatible use between the requesting entity and military officials responsible for the military base, defense facility, military training or operating area in question.

### Section 2

#### COORDINATION WITH OTHER PLANS, STUDIES, AND REGULATIONS.

The defense community shall consider the most recent compatible use studies or plans, joint land use studies, plans and studies related to compatible use, development standards, and regulations recognized by the military base or defense facility, the Department of Defense, and Federal Aviation Administration when considering zoning and regulatory changes, new land use ordinances, and when preparing county or municipal comprehensive plans.

### 10. Elimination of Regional Military Sustainability Commission in Texas Code

**Background:** The Regional Sustainability Commissions in Chapter 397A Texas Local Government Code would not protect Texas military installations and would become an unnecessary bureaucratic burden if implemented. This potentially would result in the loss of military missions in Texas.

Texas Local Government Code (LGC) Title 12. Planning and Development amended with 397A as part of the 81st Texas Legislature in 2009. The Intent was to provide mechanisms

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to reconcile a city's growth with the maintenance of the installation's mission to sustain Texas' military installations. It establishes a 9-member Sustainability Commission to "sustain military installations" and a 6-member Advisory Committee to "review new projects." No region has established either a Sustainability Commission or Advisory Committee since inception.

The provision possesses no statutory "teeth" to enact and enforce land use strategies, recommendations or regulations to protect military installations and does not grant independent land use regulatory authority to cities/counties in extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) and unincorporated areas (UA).

DOD sponsored Joint Land Use Studies (JLUS) (being replaced with Regional Compatible Use Plan) are specifically tailored to ensure compatible land use for each individual bases' military missions, and encroachment challenges

Section 397, and specifically sub-sections 397.005 and 397.006, provide the parameters through which defense communities must consult with or notify a military base or defense facility authorities with respect to development around a military installation

A combination of municipal development best practices, JLUS/RCUP, LGC subsections 397.005 and 397.006, and SB 6 (2017) are tools implemented since the LGC Title 12 was amended with Section 397A in 2009. These tools either meet or exceed the intent of the 397A language.

**Finding:** Regional Military Sustainability Commissions have proven to be an ineffective tool in assisting Texas military installations and their host defense communities with protecting the missions, operations, readiness, and resiliency of military installations. The lack of utility of the current version of a Chapter 397A Commission is validated by the fact that it has never been implemented anywhere in the decade since it has been the law. This code was found to be unworkable by the 2009 Camp Bullis Joint Land Use Implementation Committee in the City of San Antonio, a city that hosts the largest joint base in the DoD. Additionally, Guadalupe and Bexar Counties and cities adjacent to Randolph AFB concluded that the bill was unworkable in 2015.

The TMMC encourages both committees, with military and community participation, to identify new and enhanced strategies to replace the Commissions' with land/air use limitations or restrictions, regulatory strategies, or other tools to preserve military use areas inside or outside municipal boundaries.

**Recommendation:** Texas should eliminate Section 397A from Local Government Code, Title 12 and work with appropriate partners to identify new and enhanced strategies to replace the Regional Military Sustainability Commissions' with land/air use limitations or restrictions, regulatory strategies, or other tools to preserve military use areas inside or outside municipal boundaries.

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### **Appendix**

#### Efforts to Support the Military

Texas' push to support the military is not a new endeavor. Over 20 years ago, the Texas Legislature was working to improve conditions in and around military installations and in the lives of military families.

#### Funding for Military Communities

In 1997, via Senate Bill 227, the Legislature created a grant program to provide local governments with grants and low-interest loans that could be used to fund the local match requirement of federal grants for certain development projects in defense-dependent communities. This program was originally administered by the Texas Department of Commerce. In 2003 the program was moved to the Office of the Governor and administered by the Texas Military Preparedness Commission. The grant program, now called the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG), has awarded over \$85 million to local communities and leveraged over \$200 million since its inception. The original purpose of the grant program was to assist communities impacted by a federal round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). During the 83rd Texas Legislature, Senate Bill 1200 was passed amending the DEAAG statute to expand by allowing grant funds to be used prior to a round of BRAC to add military value. Since 2015, \$50 million in DEAAG funds have been awarded to communities for infrastructure projects to add military value to their local military installation. Every defense community in the state has received at least one DEAAG award. The most recent recipient, Austin Community College District, received \$2 million in support of the buildup of facilities required to support the new Army Futures Command.

#### Licensure Processes for Military Members and Their Families

Aside from funding community efforts to support the military, Texas has also made large strides to support members of the military and their families with regard to employment. As families move from state-to-state, if they wish to work in a particular field, they may be required to apply for an occupational license to practice their profession in the state. This can be overly burdensome as individuals have to meet the qualifications of the license, wait on the license application to be processed, and pay licensing and examination fees. For military families, this may be a biennial process as they move as often as every two years. Recognizing this, Texas has worked to streamline the licensing process for members of the military, veterans, and military spouses by expanding qualification timelines, providing alternative licensing procedures, providing for expedited licensure processes, and waiving examination and licensing fees for this population. Below are several examples of how Texas has reduced these burdens over the last 20 years.

In 1999, the 76<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature passed House Bill 3155, which allowed extra time for an active-duty member of the U.S. Armed Forces who was serving abroad to renew an occupational license that had expired while on active duty. That extra renewal period was provided without penalty.

The 79<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 143, which gave a member of the state military forces or members of the reserve forces additional time to complete required continuing education components related to occupational licensing.

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Senate Bill 1733, (82<sup>nd</sup> Texas Legislature), provided for alternative licensing procedures for military spouses. The bill required licensing agencies to adopt rules that would allow the issuance of licenses to military spouses if the spouse had a current license issued by another state which had substantially equivalent requirements to the Texas license.

During the 83<sup>rd</sup> Texas Legislature, six bills passed which dealt with occupational licenses for members of the military, veterans, or military spouses. Senate Bill 162 required state agencies which issue occupational licenses to provide an expedited licensure process for military members, their spouses, and veterans within one year of separation from the military. Licensing agencies were also required to issue licenses if applicants held a current license issued by another jurisdiction as long as that license had substantially equivalent requirements to Texas. Several other bills passed during this session which provided for military service, training, or education to be applied toward licensing requirements.

The 84th Texas Legislature saw a continued modification of licensing laws to ease restrictions of military members and their families. Two bills, SB 807 and SB 1307, passed to this end.

Senate Bill 807 waived examination fees for service members or veterans who have military service, training, or education substantially similar to the requirements of the license. SB 807 also waived examination fees for service members, military veterans, and military spouses who held a current license issued by another jurisdiction if the licensing requirements were substantially equivalent to Texas requirements. SB 1307 streamlined Chapter 55 of the Texas Occupations Code to ensure every military spouse, veteran, and active-duty service member would get credit for their skills and have their occupational licenses expedited.

One significant development is the Texas Veterans Portal which is described in-depth below.

### [\*\*Other Ways Texas is Supporting Service Members and their Families\*\*](#)

- **Military Family Support Pilot Program:** This pilot program is designed to better meet the needs of military spouses entering the job market at military installations in Texas.
- **Military National Dislocated Worker Board:** The board identifies individuals affected by Reductions in Force including civilian contractors, military spouses in need of assistance, and transitioning services members as populations with significant training needs.
- **Texas Department of Public Safety:** The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) offers an active-duty military reintegration program. DPS is recognized for hiring more veterans than any state agency; of the 80 troopers in the most recent graduating class, 26 are military veterans.
- **Military Friendly Schools:** 45 public and private universities and community colleges in Texas are designated Military Friendly Schools.
- **Early Childhood Education for Military Dependents:** Texas school districts are required to offer a prekindergarten program if they identify 15 or more eligible children who are at least four years of age by Sep. 1 of the current school year and who are children of an active-duty member of the armed forces or are children of a member of the armed forces injured or killed while serving on active duty.
- **Free Fishing and Hunting Licenses:** Active-duty military and disabled veterans can receive hunting and fishing licenses at no fee.
- **Reduced or Waived Fees for License to Carry:** License to carry fees are waived or reduced for eligible members or veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.

### [\*\*Efforts to Support Veterans\*\*](#)

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Most of the efforts which have been outlined so far deal with active-duty service members or their families, but Texas has made significant progress in how it supports its large veteran community. For example, Texas is the only state with a smart phone app, called the Texas Veterans Portal, which allows active duty, veterans, their family members, and providers of services direct access to benefits, 211 Connect with Veterans, and Women Veteran Programs. The online portal and app provide links to veteran benefits and services provided by Texas. The portal can be accessed through [veterans.portal.texas.gov](http://veterans.portal.texas.gov). Some of the benefits and services to which the portal connects are offered through the Office of the Governor, Texas Veterans Commission, Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Health and Human Services Commission and other state agencies. Some of the programs below can be accessed through the app. Other programs are benefits offered to veterans and incentives for companies to support veterans.

### **Jobs/Economic Opportunity**

- **New Veteran Hiring Incentive:** Governor Abbott recently announced an additional incentive program for new Texas Enterprise Fund grantees designed to encourage the hiring of military veterans. New grantees, in addition to being eligible for funding on a per job created basis, are eligible for an additional \$1,000 per job filled by a veteran during the first year of job creation.
- **Texas Talent Connection Grants:** Governor Abbott recently awarded \$5.5 million in grants for education and workforce training programs in communities across the state designed to lead to successful job placement, increased wages, and improved job retention for workforce populations including veterans.
- **Veteran's Preference & Military Service Credit:** Veterans have preference in employment with State agencies or offices, as do widows/widowers and children of those killed on active duty.
- **WorkInTexas:** The state labor exchange/job matching system places a two-day hold on all new job postings to ensure veterans get first review.
- **Texas Operation Welcome Home:** Governor Abbott requested the Texas Workforce Commission to work with Texas military installations to better meet the needs of transitioning service members and recently separated veterans. The program assists veterans in translating their military skills into civilian terms, finding employment, completing two- to four-year college programs, or obtaining the appropriate licensure or certifications to compete in the job market.
- **Skills for Transition:** Designed for separating service members who plan to remain in Texas, this program provides skills training for employment in high-growth, high-demand occupations.
- **Veterans Employment Services:** Assisting veterans in obtaining long-term meaningful employment through job matching and referrals, translating military skills to civilian jobs, resume assistance and interviewing techniques, employer outreach, and job development.
- **Red, White, and You Veteran Job Fair:** Veteran job fairs are held across the state on the same day during the week of Veterans Day.
- **We Hire Vets Campaign:** This campaign recognizes Texas employers whose workforce is comprised of 10% or more of veterans.
- **Texas Veterans Leadership Program:** A resource and referral network for veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who are transitioning back into civilian life.

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- **Veteran Entrepreneur Program:** The program assists veteran entrepreneurs in identifying funding sources, mentors, business opportunities and business education programs in a one-stop-shop.
- **Contract Preferences:** All state agencies when purchasing goods give first preference to goods produced or offered by a service-disabled Texas veteran.
- **Work Opportunity Tax Credits:** A tax incentive is offered for employers hiring individuals from specific populations with historically higher rates of unemployment, including veterans.
- **Troops to Teachers:** A federally funded program that assists military personnel and veterans with transitioning into a new career as public school teachers in "high-needs" school districts. There are 25 state TTT support offices to help with certification requirements.
- **Women Veterans Program:** The mission of the program is to ensure that the women veterans in Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services.
- **Texas Veterans Land Board:** The board offers land loans, home loans, and home improvement loans to veterans and surviving spouses that meet the eligibility requirements.

### Education

- **Hazlewood Act:** A Texas education benefit of up to 150 credits hours of exempted tuition at a state-supported college or university for eligible veterans and their spouses and dependents.
- **College Credit for Heroes:** A program to maximize the amount of college credit for military training and occupational experience, reducing the amount of time a veteran spends in the classroom.
- **Accelerated Degree Programs:** Thirteen Texas colleges and universities have created a total of 76 acceleration curricula in fields such as emergency medical services, surgical technology, respiratory therapy, health information technology, nursing, cyber security, information technology, firefighting, advanced manufacturing, logistics, wind engineering, and oil field technology.

### Healthcare

- **Veterans + Family Alliance Grant Program:** The grant program seeks to improve the quality of life of veterans and family members through expanded availability, increased access, and enhanced delivery of mental health treatment and services.
- **Health Care Advocacy Program:** The program uses experienced advocates with close working relationships with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to serve as liaisons for veterans and resolve access issues involving health care related services.
- **No Cost Medical Records:** Texas veterans are eligible for no cost medical records when they are obtained to file a claim for a disability with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **Claims Representation and Counseling:** The program assists Texas veterans, their families, and survivors in obtaining federal benefits and entitlements from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- **Veterans Mental Health Program:** The program's mission is to train and provide technical assistance to service members, veterans, their families, and community- and faith-based organizations on peer-to-peer counseling. Peer-to-peer services help

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individuals who have been directly or indirectly impacted by military-related trauma. The program also helps individuals access treatment.

- **Veteran Suicide Prevention Action Plan:** The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) is developing a comprehensive action plan with short- and long-term goals to increase access to, and availability of, professional veteran health services to prevent suicide among the population.
- **Integrated Care Study for Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder:** HHSC, in collaboration with the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, is conducting a study related to the benefits of providing integrated care to veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **Veterans Treatment Court:** There are over 30 county-operated Veteran Court programs in Texas helping veterans with PTSD, substance-use disorders, and mental health issues avoid incarceration and rehabilitate themselves.

### **Quality of Life**

- **Toll Fees Waived:** Tolls are waived on several Texas toll roads for eligible veterans, who must be in a vehicle registered with the State of Texas and displaying a qualified specialty license plate.
- **Fund for Veterans' Assistance:** The program oversees six grant categories: General Assistance, Housing4TexasHeroes, Veterans Mental Health, Veterans Treatment Court, Highly Rural Transportation, and Veteran County Service Office Grants. These grants offer funding to non-profit and local government organizations to provide direct services to Texas veterans and their families.
- **Special Vehicle License Plates:** Disabled Veterans, Former Prisoners of War, Pearl Harbor Survivors, Purple Heart, and Medal of Honor plates are among the special vehicle license plates available for personal use on an automobile or light commercial vehicle.
- **Veteran Designation for Driver Licenses and Identification Cards:** Department of Public Safety offers a "veteran" designation printed on the face of driver licenses and identification cards for qualifying veterans.
- **Disabled Parking Placard & Registration of Vehicles for Disabled Veterans:** A disabled veteran may register two vehicles without payment of fees (with the exception of fees for specialty plates).
- **Free Driver License for Disabled Veterans:** Texas driver licenses are furnished free-of-charge to eligible disabled veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces.
- **Free Recording Charges:** The county clerk in each county is required to record, at no charge, the official discharge of a veteran who served in the U.S. Armed Forces.
- **Free State Park Admission for Disabled Veterans:** The State Parklands Passport provides free admission to Texas State parks for disabled veterans.

### **Other Support Services**

- **Texas State Veterans Home Program:** Currently, the Texas State Veterans Home Program operates nursing homes in Houston, Bonham, Floresville, Big Spring, McAllen, El Paso, Temple, Tyler, and Amarillo. It offers affordable nursing home care for Texas veterans, their spouses, and Gold Star Parents. **Texas State Veterans Cemetery Program:** Through a partnership with the VA, the Veterans Land Board builds and operates Texas State Veterans Cemeteries. Currently, there are four cemeteries in operation with more in the planning stage. These State Veterans Cemeteries are located

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in Abilene, Corpus Christi, Killeen, and Mission. There is no charge for internment of veterans, spouses, and eligible dependents.

- **Students Sounding Taps at Military Funerals:** The Texas Veterans Commission has established a program to encourage students in grades 6 through 12 or post-secondary educational institutions to sound “Taps” on a bugle, trumpet, or coronet as part of military honors funerals held in Texas for deceased veterans.
- **Unaccompanied Veteran Burials:** The Veterans Land Board works with local communities and veteran support groups to ensure that no veteran in Texas is ever buried without military honors.