Governor’s Committee to Support the Military

2018 Report

# **Background**

On September 5, 2018, Governor Abbott issued an Executive Order establishing the Governor’s Committee to Support the Military (Committee) because Texans serve at home and abroad, and many 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.[[1]](#footnote-1) Statistics from the Department of Veterans Affairs showed over 1.6 million veterans resided in Texas as of September 2015[[2]](#footnote-2), which is the second largest population of veterans in the United States. With 15 military installations, over $101 billion in output, and almost $40 billion in disposable personal income, the U.S. military is one of Texas’ largest industries.[[3]](#footnote-3) As such, it is important the state collaborates with the U.S. military to ensure the mutually beneficially partnership continues.

The Committee’s creation was another step forward in Texas’ continued strong support for the military and military families. Over the past several years, Texas has repeatedly shown its dedication to the armed forces and those who serve. Texas has done this through multiple approaches, including investing infrastructure dollars into installations, reducing burdensome licensing requirements, and developing employment, education, and healthcare programs for veterans. A full list of these programs and initiatives can be found in the Appendix.

# **Committee Purpose**

The Committee was created to actively work to keep Texas a military-friendly state. To do this, the Committee took on five charges from the Governor:

* Study and make recommendations on how best to maintain and enhance military value at existing military installations in Texas;
* Study and make recommendations on how best to make Texas a more attractive destination for additional military missions;
* Collaborate with local governments and chambers of commerce to explore surrounding civilian infrastructure and identify competing and complementary needs between private development, the rights of private landowners, and military necessities;
* Examine the 2005 criteria used by the Base Realignment and Closure (“BRAC”) Commission and identify strategies to avoid future base closures; and
* Coordinate with the Texas Military Preparedness Commission and Texas Military Values Task Force.

# Each of these charges is important for the future of the military in Texas. And to some degree, many of these issues have been studied by the Texas Military Preparedness Commission. However, imbedded in each of these issues is the uncertainty of the criteria that will be used for the next round of BRAC. Those criteria are likely changing, and it is up to Texas to be prepared. While there is no timetable on the next BRAC, Texas’ biennial legislature provides a much smaller window to make adjustments than most other states. In other words, the efforts of the Committee are forward thinking and competitive-minded.

With 15 military installations and over $101 billion in economic activity, a new round of BRAC could have significant impacts on local communities’ and the state’s economy. The process could also bring more missions to Texas. With the work of the Committee, Texas Military Preparedness Commission, Texas Military Value Task Force, the Legislature, and the Governor, Texas can work to ensure future BRAC rounds are a net positive for the state. Additionally, the Governor recognizes missions and members of the military are only part of the equation. Military families also sacrifice and should be supported accordingly. To that end, the Executive Order also created the Auxiliary Military Spouse Task Force (Spouse Task Force), a subcommittee of the Committee, to study how quality of life can be enhanced for members of the military and their families.

# Regarding BRAC, in a February 23, 2018, joint letter to the National Governors Association, Secretary of the Army Mark T. Esper, Secretary of the Navy Richard V. Spencer, and Secretary of the Air Force Heather Wilson wrote:

*We are often asked what communities can do to support those who serve. While focus on the mission is always our priority, the factors military families cite most frequently as drawbacks to military service include military dependent's difficulty assimilating into local school systems following a duty station transfer, the quality of schools available for their children, and the ability of spouses to obtain jobs and sustain careers.  With that in mind, we will encourage leadership to consider the quality of schools near bases and whether reciprocity of professional licenses is available for military families when evaluating future basing or mission alternatives.[[4]](#footnote-4)*

Additionally, Robert McMahon, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainability, spoke at a forum in early November and addressed the issue of communities and their support of the military, “Having a military installation in your community is a privilege, not a right. . . . [A]re you earning that privilege? Are you doing what is necessary to maintain that economic engine in your community?”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Together, the Committee and the Spouse Task Force have a broad charge to identify challenges faced by the military and its members and their families in Texas. As a whole, the Committee is required to provide a written report of its findings, activities, and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature.

# **Committee Composition**

The Committee consists of up to 22 members appointed by the Governor. Those members include military veterans, guard and reserve components, and community and business leaders. All branches of the U.S. Armed Forces are represented in the Committee. Additionally, diverse locations around the state, including areas significantly impacted by military installations, are represented.

The Spouse Task Force contains up to seven military spouses. They, too, represent a cross-section of experiences and locations.

# **Committee Activities**

The Committee was created and its twenty-two members were appointed on September 5, 2018. Since its creation, three in-person meetings have been held in Austin.

## September 27th Meeting

The first Committee meeting was held on September 27, 2018. At that meeting the Committee discussed their charges, salient issues related to the military and military families, and created subcommittees to address three broad categories of challenges:

* Education and Quality of Life
* Workforce Development
* Encroachment and Infrastructure Improvement

The Committee identified several areas of potential further study such as issues related to licensing, education, and installation resiliency. Those identified challenges were then included in future discussions with state agencies and served as the basis for much of the Committee’s future work.

After that meeting, the subcommittees discussed challenges and potential recommendations related to their areas.

## October 18th Meeting

The second Committee meeting was held on October 18, 2018. At that meeting, Committee members discussed the potential value of a case management system that would assist veterans and military members to transition into new communities. In November of 2017, Governor Greg Abbott released his priorities for meeting the needs of veterans in Texas. One of those priorities was to challenge veteran’s organizations, foundations, municipalities, and community organizations to end veteran homelessness in Texas. Traditional models of delivery of private services has involved agencies or nonprofits compiling a resource directory of available services. It is then incumbent on the veteran to navigate the potential providers in the directory and determine eligibility for each service and then reach out to each potential provider to receive services. As part of the discussions on ending veteran homelessness, the State sought ways to be more impactful on veterans in transition and in the delivery of private assistance and to improve on the resource directory model of service delivery. Through this process, the Office of the Governor became aware of TXServes in the San Antonio area.

San Antonio and its surrounding area is one of the largest military and veteran communities in the United States. The Alamo Area Council of Governments in San Antonio acts as the TXServes care coordination center in the area to facilitate a network of coordinated public, private, and nonprofit services to support veterans, service members, and their families. TXServes uses the network of providers and technology, the Unite US case management system, to guide veterans, service members, and their families to the most appropriate services and resources and is able to efficiently and effectively track outcomes. At this meeting the Committee was able to see and discuss the improved model of service delivery and the benefits of such a model and case management system expanding to other parts of the state.

Additionally, Texas Education Agency Commissioner Mike Morath spoke to the group and fielded questions related to education issues for military spouses and children, teacher certification for military spouses, and military readiness of Texas students. Finally, a discussion occurred related to finding ways to increase the military value of installations and address encroachments issues. Several legislative recommendations were developed from these discussions and are included below.

## November 15th Meeting

The third Committee meeting was held on November 15th, 2018. At this meeting, the Committee discussed recommendations for this report. Those recommendations are included below.

# **Auxiliary Military Spouse Task Force**

The Governor appointed the Auxiliary Military Spouse Task Force on November 12, 2018. The Task Force conducted several teleconferences and drafted recommendations to enhance the quality of life for military families in Texas.

# **Committee Findings and Recommendations**

The findings and recommendations are grouped by subcommittee. Spouse Task Force recommendations are also placed within these subcommittee categories where appropriate, but they are not broken out separately. The Spouse Task Force often enhanced original Committee recommendations by providing additional specificity which has been incorporated into and improved the overall recommendation. Additional background information is also provided. Each recommendation is meant to enhance the lives of service members and their families and improve the state’s position with regard to the next round or BRAC.

## Education, Health Care, and Quality of Life

### Licensure/Certification Transfer and Acceptance for Military Spouses and Teacher Certifications

**Background**: Military families relocate frequently. While the military member has a guarantee of employment, the spouse has to navigate the job market and requirements of the new location. As military spouses relocate, transferring an occupational license from state to state is difficult due to the length of the licensure processes, different rules/standards of acceptance from state to state, and needing an in-state address to start the process. In addition, every profession seems to have various differences from state to state. In some cases, previous clinical or professional hours are not recognized in Texas. This results in less pay initially with additional time needed to obtain the level that was credited for in the previous state or more professional requirements to be met during the relocation to a new duty station. This works against the military spouse seeking employment at the same professional and compensation level while also impacting the household. For example, a joint report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Defense showed twelve percent of military spouses, or 42,733 individuals, are trained to work in education. As they move from state to state, that requires additional certifications.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, it is impossible to apply for those certifications until the spouse is physically located in Texas, thus increasing the length of time they are unemployed.

**Finding**: The Committee and the Spouse Task Force agree that some current licensing and certification restrictions are unnecessary and overly burdensome, especially on military families.

**Recommendation**: Streamline the process for all professional licenses and certifications by:

* Investigating requirements for most common occupational licenses to ensure that the experience and licensure of military members and spouses in other states will count toward licensure in Texas;
* Providing a comprehensive website which could be used as a resource to facilitate the licensure of military members and spouses in Texas;
* Adopting a policy to accept licenses and certifications from states with standards that are substantially equivalent to Texas standards;
* Allowing military members and spouses to establish residency in Texas for the purpose of meeting occupational licensing and teacher certification requirements upon the provision of their Permanent Change of Station (PCS) orders and military ID;
* Conducting a study to identify increased opportunities for:
* Allowing the clinical documents or hours obtained by military members and spouses in other states or while serving in the military to count toward licensure in Texas; and
* Issuing temporary licenses to military service members and spouses so they can be employed in their profession while completing the requirements for licensure in Texas.

### Early Enrollment in School for Children of Service Members

**Background**: Currently, Proof of Residency is required to enroll a child in school in Texas. Select school districts allow early enrollment but there is no uniform policy within the state. A large portion of military families move during the summer when children have finished school at an old location and school at the new location has not begun. This potentially prohibits children that are moving from enrolling in summer programs or enrolling in advanced programs with limited space. This challenge is especially limiting for those parents wishing to enroll their children in charter or magnet schools. Those schools usually have long waitlists that a student cannot be placed on until they fulfill the residency requirements. This essentially prohibits a child from a military family from enrolling in such schools.

**Finding**: Because of residency requirements, many military children are unable to enroll in schools until physically arriving in Texas, thus limiting chances to enroll in competitive programs and at charter and magnet schools.

**Recommendation**: Change current law to allow for advance enrollment of a child who is a dependent of a member of the military upon receipt of valid military orders assigning them to a nearby military installation.

### TEA Military Webpage

**Background**: One of the most important things members of the military do upon arriving in Texas is find a school to enroll their children. TEA has worked hard to create military-friendly programs and assist with the transition to Texas, but as reported by the Spouse Task Force, finding those programs is not always easy for new arrivals into Texas.

**Finding**: Navigating the various programs and opportunities for students can be a burden for our military families, especially those unfamiliar with the Texas Education Agency.

**Recommendation**: TEA should prominently display a link to its Military Family Resources page on its homepage. This link should also be incorporated into any type of central online repository for military families (See Recommendation 10).

### 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.

**Recommendation:** Add the current $500,000 biennium funding for the Military Child Education Coalition to TEA’s base appropriation request.

### 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 are prepared for either college, career, or the military upon graduation. By including military enlistment in 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 college and career measures, the Texas Education Agency and school districts have access to data such as where students attend university, what industry certifications they receive. However, since the 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. 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 prepare students 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.

**Recommendation**: Work with federal partners to encourage data sharing between the Defense Manpower Data Center and the Texas Education Agency.

### 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 Military 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**: The Texas Education Agency 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**: Amend Chapter 162 of the Texas Education Code to allow for the establishment of a state council for the Military Compact and incorporate input from military families and best practices from other states in determining who should be a member of the council.

### 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.

**Recommendation**: TXServes is an initiative currently operating in San Antonio and soon to be used 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. TXServes should be expanded in communities across the state to achieve as much coverage as possible utilizing their 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.

### 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. It does this by requiring local jurisdictions to either increase other taxes and fees or reduce the services they can provide. For example, Killeen, Nolanville, and Harker Heights have lost significant amounts of revenue due to do this exemption. Those revenue losses are either not being fully reimbursed by the state (Killeen), or in the case of Harker Heights and Nolanville, not being reimbursed at all. This will negatively affect services and infrastructure, and may lead to increased taxes and fees in these cities. [[7]](#footnote-7) As we move towards the next BRAC, quality of life issues in local communities will be an important metric for scoring an installation, and as the disabled veterans’ tax exemption impacts local services and infrastructure, it has the potential to negatively affect the BRAC score.

**Findings**: The disabled veterans’ tax exemption is creating unintended, negative consequences on the quality of life for some local communities. The program should continue, but needs to be modified to more accurately fit today’s veteran community.

**Recommendation**: Eligibility for this program should expand to include counties with a military installation, the cities in that county, and cities in an adjacent county so as to provide reimbursement for cities near the installation, but not contiguous to the installation. The Legislature should also fully fund the program to allow for eligible cities to be reimbursed for 100% of lost revenue.

## Workforce Development

### Encourage Advanced Manufacturing and Technology Certification and Degree Programs

**Background**: Military Depots in Texas frequently struggle to maintain a workforce with skills in advanced manufacturing and technology. Private industry also has high demands for these specialized skills. Additionally, as members of the military transition from the military to civilian life, finding ways to integrate their military experience into the private sector will be 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.

**Recommendation**: Encourage high schools, technical and community colleges, and universities to invest in programs that support the growing advanced manufacturing and technology demands. Require the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas Workforce Commission to work with military installations in Texas to meet these workforce demands and reshape or lessen any requirements that are unnecessary or duplicative with the needs of military bases or any on-the-job training that bases will provide to certified employees, regardless of certification status.

Direct any Education Service Center in the state of Texas with a military base in its service area to convene working groups with representatives from local school districts, local workforce boards, the Texas Education Agency, Texas State Technical Colleges, local community colleges, and the local base on the unmet workforce needs of that base. Require the aforementioned parties to discuss:

* Misalignment between current course offerings at educational institutions and the needs of the base;
* Elimination or repurposing of any existing certification or degree requirements or rules that preclude otherwise certified individuals from working on a base;
* Elimination or repurpose of any existing certification or degree requirements that are duplicative of any training that individuals employed on the base will receive as a necessary function of their base employment;
* Creation of shared services arrangements between school districts and local institutions of higher education to provide increased access to necessary coursework for high school students; and
* Other barriers to entry created by the educational systems to employment on the base, including discussion on the Career, College, and Military readiness of local high school graduates.

Require TEA to consider the needs of Texas military bases 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 bases and alter programs of study requirements to align with the needs of the military community as well as the private sector. Require TEA to consider mandating that school districts surrounding a military base offer courses in a program of study that could lead to employment by students on base at graduation. Require the THECB to conduct a similar process within their current rulemaking authority with local institutions of higher education.

These changes will provide workforce development for military depot facilities as well as potentially attract commercial advanced manufacturing and technology industries to the state.

### Create a Central Online Repository for Information Related to Military Families

**Background**: When military families are preparing to move to Texas, they have to navigate many different agencies to find information that pertains to them. For example, the spouse of an active duty member of the military may have an occupational license for which licensing fees could be waived or substantial equivalency granted. Seemingly simple needs often become compounded by an unfamiliarity with Texas. For example, children need to be enrolled in school and the adults need Texas drivers’ licenses. However, navigating the numerous state agencies to meet very specific needs can be difficult, even for native Texans. Individuals who do not know agency functions, or even what agencies exist, are at a distinct disadvantage. This can have significant effects on those looking to find employment and a sense of normalcy as quickly as possible once they move to Texas.

**Findings**: Due to the number of specialized services available to members of the military, it is important they can access that information at one location instead of the current piecemeal approach.

**Recommendation**: Create a central online repository for information that is specific to the military and their families. This should include but is not limited to information related to any assistance, waivers, and programs the state provides as it relates to occupational and professional licenses, education, and healthcare. A potential location for such a repository is on the Texas.gov website, but it must include an easily identifiable link for military members and their families.

## Encroachment and Infrastructure

### 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. Rather, road improvements on military installations are paid for with federal funds. 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:** If TxDOT were allowed to enter into agreements with military installations for the maintenance, improvement, relocation, or extension of existing roads it could reduce costs for the military installations and improve base infrastructure; the latter of which is an important metric related to BRAC.

**Recommendation**: Legislative changes should be enacted which allow for TxDOT to enter into interagency agreements or contracts with military installations for the maintenance, improvement, relocation, or extension of existing roads. These services should be paid for with federal funds.

### 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 two biennia, $50 million was appropriated to the Texas Military Preparedness Commission for the purposes of providing DEAAG grants. Those funds were awarded to a total of seventeen projects benefitting fourteen installations surrounding communities with a combined return on investment of $130M to the state.

**Findings**: The DEAAG program is a proactive effort by the Legislature to enhance the military value of military installations in Texas, and that program has proven successful over time. 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 BRAC.

**Recommendation**: Fully fund the DEAAG program to help protect military installations in Texas from potential negative impacts of BRAC.

### Encroachment on Military Training

**Background**: Military training capabilities are 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. 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.

**Finding**: Failure to protect 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.

**Recommendation**: The 85th Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 277 which prohibited Chapter 313 tax subsidies and abatements for wind energy projects within 30 nautical miles of the boundaries of fixed-wing military aviation facilities. However, legislation or policy changes should be considered which strengthens the state’s protections against encroachment, including commercial development. This includes adding prohibitions against 313 subsidies that may impact rotary-wing aviation training areas and military training routes located outside military installation boundaries.

# **Conclusion**

Texas welcomes the military, military family members, and veterans. The state has passed legislation to ensure that it continues to be a friendly place that embraces our service members. The Governor’s Committee to Support the Military in Texas was a sincere look to anticipate the needs of service members, their families, and veterans so that Texas can keep its relationship with the military strong while continuing to build and grow that relationship. Thank you for the opportunity to serve on this committee. The committee members look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature to implement any recommendation they see as appropriate.

# **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 buildout 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 76th 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 79th 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.

Senate Bill 1733, (82nd 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 83rd 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

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](https://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.
* **Veteran Entrepreneur Program:** The program assists veteran entrepreneurs in identifying funding sources, mentors, business opportunities and business education programs in a one-stop-shop.
* **Tax Waiver for New Veteran-Owned Businesses:** A qualifying new veteran-owned business in Texas is not subject to franchise tax for its initial five-year period.
* **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 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 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. A ninth home is currently under construction in Houston.
* **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 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.
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