

***Texas Coordinating  
Council for Veterans  
Services***



***Sixth Report  
October 1, 2022***

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# *Introductory Letter*

*Thomas P. Palladino, Chairman*

Dear State Leaders,

It is my honor and privilege to submit to you the Sixth Report of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services (TCCVS).

This report identifies veteran needs, identifies services currently provided by the state, and makes recommendations to address those needs. This report represents countless hours of research, discussion, and ultimately consensus, by the members of TCCVS.

TCCVS was established by the 82nd Legislature to:

coordinate the activities of state agencies that assist veterans, servicemembers, and their families; coordinate outreach efforts that ensure veterans, servicemembers, and their families are made aware of services; and facilitate collaborative relationships among state, federal, and local agencies, and private organizations to identify and address issues affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

Veterans of the United States military have demonstrated a continuous desire to settle in or relocate to Texas. Despite the dedicated efforts of those working to assist veterans, there remains a persistent need and demand for veteran services. The continued influx of veterans into the state coupled with the increasing demand of an aging population of WWII, Korea, Vietnam, and Gulf War I era veterans validates the need for continued coordination and support of Texas agencies that provide services to veterans.

Texas citizens take pride in recognizing and showing appreciation for the sacrifices military women and men have made to the United States. As a result, Texas continues to lead the nation in its support of veterans. The public support of veterans and the Texas Legislature's historical response to it, has become generally known as "The Texas Model." Currently, state leaders have an opportunity to continue this by boldly addressing the veteran issues and challenges highlighted in this report.

Thank you for giving the members of TCCVS the opportunity to engage in this important work—i.e., identifying the needs of Texas veterans and suggesting legislative solutions to those problems. We appreciate your serious attention to these issues. Again, Texas is leading the nation on solving veteran issues, and we look forward to working with you to make TCCVS's recommendations a reality for Texas veterans.

Sincerely,



Thomas P. Palladino,  
Chairman Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services

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## Executive Summary

The Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services (TCCVS) was created during the 82nd Legislature (2011) by Senate Bill 1796. The Texas Legislature established the Council to accomplish three tasks:

1. Coordinate the activities of state agencies that assist veterans, servicemembers, and their families;
2. Coordinate outreach efforts that ensure that veterans, servicemembers, and their families are made aware of services; and
3. Facilitate collaborative relationships among state, federal, and local agencies and private organizations to identify and address issues affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

The Council, originally comprised of five state agencies, currently consist of the following 22 Texas agencies and departments:

Department of Aging and Disability Services	Office of Public Utility Counsel	Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation	Texas Workforce Commission
Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services	State Bar of Texas	Texas Department of Motor Vehicles	Texas Workforce Investment Council
Department of Family and Protective Services	Texas Commission on Jail Standards	Texas Department of Public Safety	Texas Veterans Commission
Department of State Health Services	Texas Commission on Law Enforcement	Texas Department of Transportation	Texas Veterans Land Board
Health and Human Services Commission	Texas Department of Criminal Justice	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board	
Office of Acquired Brain Injury	Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs	Texas Military Department	

Senate Bill 1796 enabled the TCCVS to establish workgroups to focus on specific policy areas affecting veterans, servicemembers, and their families. For the purposes of this report the Council has established the following nine workgroups:

Health	Higher Education	Transportation
Mental Health	Criminal Justice	Women Veterans
Employment	Housing	Pro Bono Legal Services

- Pursuant to legislative direction of Senate Bill 200, 84th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2015, the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) consolidated agencies to streamline similar business functions. The Department of Aging and Disability Services and the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services were abolished. Their programs and functions were transferred to HHSC and the Department of State Health Services. Pursuant to the legislative direction of Senate Bill 208, 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, Regular Session, 2015, the functions of Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Services for older individuals who are blind, and the Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center were transferred from the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services to the Texas Workforce Commission.

# *Health Workgroup*

## Health Workgroup

### Veteran Need #1

Veterans and their families in rural areas do not have adequate access to health care and related services.

### Recommendation:

- State and local government agencies play a critical role in ensuring veterans in rural areas of the state can access health care and other veteran-related services. These entities should make every effort to conduct outreach and engagement campaigns to promote health among their veteran populations.
- Targeted outreach and engagement funding for veteran healthcare and support services in rural parts of the state must be made available to state and local government agencies to effectively promote awareness of healthcare services and resources. Reporting on such efforts should become prioritized to ensure accountability for efforts to improve healthcare outcomes for veterans is achieved and maintained.

### Background:

The majority of VHA Medical Centers (United States Department of Veterans Affairs Hospitals and United States Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinics) are in metropolitan areas. The VHA has established Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) in smaller cities throughout Texas. Through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Choice program, the VHA has provided contracted medical services for those areas not served by the VA medical facilities and to reduce the patient appointment wait time. Therefore, there are many veterans who live in rural areas who find it difficult to access VA medical care. The VA is improving its telehealth services to provide better access. However, being in rural areas presents specific challenges to implement (connectivity, bandwidth, maintenance, etc.). The VA is addressing these challenges by providing telehealth/telemedicine access to veterans via cellular phone technology. Rural veterans find it difficult to travel to their appointments because of the long distances. The VHA's Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) has established a network of transportation options for veterans through joint efforts with VHA's Office of Rural Health, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), community transportation providers, federal, state, and local government transportation agencies, non-profits, and Veterans Transportation Community Living Initiative (VTCLI) grantees. The VTS is currently in place in the El Paso, Dallas, Amarillo, Big Spring, and Harlingen facilities. Through the VA Highly Rural Transportation

Grants, The Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans Assistance (FVA) provides transportation funds for highly rural counties to transport veterans to their medical appointments.



# *Mental Health Workgroup*

# Mental Health Workgroup

## Veteran Need #1

There is a need for increased access to trauma informed, military culturally competent mental health services.

### Recommendations:

- Encourage higher education entities (i.e., state colleges and universities) offering degrees in and related to mental health to include education on the unique mental health needs of service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF).
- In efforts to promote military cultural competency and to address mental health workforce shortages, promote/encourage the development of supervised learning opportunities with SMVF through internships, externships, practicum rotations, and postdoctoral fellowships.
- Encourage Texas professional licensing boards to promote military cultural competency as a valued opportunity to meet continuing education requirements.
- Encourage/require state agencies and institutions likely to interact with SMVF to implement a military cultural competency training requirement for staff. This is notably relevant in higher education, community healthcare, mental health, and employment settings.
- Promote military cultural competency training and certification opportunities that include focus on the impact of service-related traumas including traumatic brain injuries, posttraumatic stress, comorbid diagnoses, moral injury, and military sexual trauma.
- Enhance strategies to address the needs of family members of veterans and service members to include specific emphasis on spouses, children, and caregivers.
- Promote efforts aimed at early screening of prior military service (e.g., Ask the Question “Did You Serve?” Campaign, etc.); especially those that ask about military service over “veteran” status to enhance service connection.
- Enhance outreach strategies, media campaigns, and public service announcements aimed at promoting veteran mental health needs and available state and local services.
- Increase internal supports among organizations to address on-the-job secondary trauma exposure among workforces made up of veterans and those serving veterans.

## Veteran Need #2

Suicide prevention and intervention for Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) is a continued need.

### Recommendations:

- Encourage the prioritized use of evidence-based and clinical best practices for suicide prevention training (e.g., AS+K, ASIST, QPR, SAVE, etc.), lethal means training (e.g., CALM), suicide screening (e.g., C-SSRS, etc.), suicide intervention (i.e., crisis

intervention training, mobile crisis outreach teams), and suicide postvention (e.g., loss teams, critical incident debriefs, caring contacts, psychological autopsy/root cause analyses, etc.).

- Promote and accelerate strategies aligned with the recommendations put forth by the forthcoming Texas State Plan for Suicide Prevention, Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council's Texas Statewide Behavioral Health Strategic Plan, Workforce Behavioral Health Plan, Long-Term Action Plan, and 988 Implementation Plan.
- Promote suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies for SMVF that include focus on the needs of family members of veterans and service members to include specific emphasis on spouses, children, and caregivers.
- Encourage access to education on advanced risk factors for suicide among veterans including comorbid physical disabilities, traumatic brain injury, homelessness, justice involvement, and the early transitional period out of military service. Specifically, enhance strategies for SMVF who are diagnosed with disability so that risk factors, protective factors, and screening for suicide can be evaluated immediately at the time of diagnosis.
- Promote and enhance efforts aimed at early screening of prior military service (e.g., Ask the Question "Did You Serve?" Campaign, etc.) in tandem to suicide risk screening (e.g., C-SSRS).
- Encourage/require all Texas healthcare providers, including physicians, nursing staff, and licensed mental health professionals to receive suicide prevention and intervention training to attain licensure and as part of their continuing education and licensure renewal requirements.
- Encourage/require state agencies and state grantees who directly work with SMVF to take advantage of free training in suicide gatekeeping and military cultural competency offered by the Texas Veterans Commission, the VA, and others.
- Encourage/require all state agencies serving veterans to develop internal suicide prevention/intervention plans.
- Promote local multidisciplinary collaborative strategies including those implemented by the Mayor's Challenges to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families in Austin and Houston.
- Encourage/require higher education entities (i.e., state colleges and universities) that offer degrees in mental health related fields to include suicide prevention and intervention in their curriculum.
- Promote partnerships between state/local government and community partners through supporting the building and strengthening of multidisciplinary local veteran serving coalitions leveraging local providers and volunteers (e.g., Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative local coalitions, Military Veteran Peer Network, etc.).
- Promote/encourage state standardization in methodology related to defining and determining cause of death, data collection/sharing, and reporting deaths by suicide among all medical examiners, coroners, and justice of the peace.
- Enhance outreach strategies, media campaigns, public service announcements aimed at promoting veteran mental health needs, suicide prevention efforts, and available state and local services (e.g., Veterans Crisis Line, TVC Buddy Check, VA promotions, interagency collaborations, etc.).

### **Veteran Need #3**

Criminal justice professionals (i.e., court professionals, law enforcement, jail-corrections, community supervision, etc.) need training on veteran mental health needs to increase positive outcomes in community interactions, diversion, and reentry.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Encourage opportunities for professionals to receive training tailored to addressing veteran mental health needs in the criminal justice arena including military cultural competency, crisis intervention training, reentry planning, etc.
- Encourage that Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) 4067, Trauma Affected Veterans, become a requirement for all law enforcement officers to create a safer environment for both veterans and law enforcement in Texas.
- Encourage efforts including those by TVC's Justice Involved Veteran Program to support the Veteran Treatment Courts across Texas through technical assistance and training opportunities for all court personnel attuned to the unique needs of justice involved veterans and best practices.
- Promote continued training opportunities for correctional staff and community supervision on evidence-based and best practices shown effective in the rehabilitation of justice involved veterans (e.g., veteran-specific programming, peer services, veteran dorms/pods, reentry planning, etc.).

### **Veteran Need #4**

There is a need for accessible, local, equitable, evidence-based interventions (i.e., community mental health, mobile crisis outreach, telehealth, etc.) for veterans in rural & metropolitan areas across Texas.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Prioritize efforts that pay special attention to equitable access for all veterans and address accessibility barriers including distance, physical disabilities, transportation, discharge status, and others.
- Promote and strengthen existing partnerships between state/local government and community partners through multidisciplinary local veteran serving coalitions (e.g., Texas Veterans Network, Texas Suicide Prevention Collaborative local coalitions, etc.), utilizing faith-based organizations and community partners (e.g., TVC's Faith and Allegiance Initiative, etc.), and local peer services (e.g., Military Veteran Peer Network).
- Promote strategies specifically aimed at mental health and supportive services for former service members who may not qualify for services through the VA or may have barriers to accessing VA due to factors including rural location, discharge status, federal activation status, etc.
- Promote and enhance the Veteran Counselor pilot program stewarded by TVC and HHSC and local mental health authorities, as it aims to increase access to accessible and

evidence-based treatment specific to SMVF across Texas through telehealth and in-person sessions.

- Develop and prioritize efforts to address the statewide workforce shortages and positions with high turnover rates among state and local organizations that serve SMVF. Such efforts should include leveraging the opportunity to increase access to telehealth therapy for SMVF, especially for those in rural communities.
- Encourage efforts to increase the number of mobile crisis outreach teams in local mental health authorities.
- Promote community-based efforts (i.e., TVC's Faith and Allegiance Initiative and the VA's Community Clergy Training Program) that utilize faith-based communities as an opportunity to identify veterans who may be struggling and bridge connections to available services. Such efforts are of significant relevance in rural communities where access to the VA and community providers can be limited.

### **Veteran Need #5**

There is a need for increased access to peer services for Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) in rural and metropolitan areas across Texas.

### **Recommendations:**

- Support strategies to promote and enhance the Military Veteran Peer Network, including ways to expand the presence of TVC-Certified Peer Service Coordinators to better serve SMVF in their local communities. The need for more Peer Service Coordination is particularly relevant in rural and frontier parts of the state.
- Develop strategies to expand the use of peer support in Veteran Treatment Courts as an effective component to strengthen efforts to reduce recidivism and promote recovery.
- Encourage strategies (e.g., Faith and Allegiance Initiative, chaplaincies) that aim to leverage peer opportunities within communities of faith and congregations.
- Support efforts to increase access to veteran peer support within jails and prisons across Texas by increasing the number of veteran pods. These efforts could strengthen successful community reentry efforts and aid in reducing recidivism.
- Encourage the development and strengthening of local SMVF affinity groups across Texas, especially in rural areas with limited access to VAs and few community resources.
- To promote an effective continuum of care, encourage utilization of multidisciplinary service approach to address veteran mental health needs including physicians, mental health professionals, and trained peers.

# *Employment Workgroup*

## Employment Workgroup

### Veteran Need #1

There is a need for a transferable veteran hiring preference for veterans with an unemployability rating to the veteran's spouse.

### Recommendation:

An online certification and consent form would allow the veteran to transfer Veterans Hiring Preference benefits; and inform agencies of the benefit transfer. The consent form would be signed by the veteran and presented with the spouse's employment application. The veteran would be required to include the Department of Veteran Affairs Summary of Benefits Letter. This process would be like the Hazlewood Act Exemption benefit transfer process for veterans.

### Background:

In 2015 Governor Greg Abbott signed the Military Veterans Full Employment Act. The Act applied the Veteran Preference to state agencies and institutions of higher education. The enactment of this closely aligned the eligibility of Veterans Hiring Preference with Federal Regulations and eligibility for preference. The derived preference was established for the Federal program through the Veterans Employment Opportunity Act of 1998. According to the Texas Workforce Investment Council's 2019 Veterans in Texas Report, over 34% of Veterans in Texas have a VA disability rating between 70% to 100%. From Department of Veteran Affairs reports we estimate that 12% to 14% of these veterans have an Individual Unemployability rating. The spouse of these Veterans with an unemployability rating in most situations is going to be the primary income for the veteran's family. Affording the spouse with the Veterans Hiring Preference will provide greater opportunities for sustainable income and a better quality of life for the veterans and their family.

1. Under the derived Veterans Hiring Preference rule, the spouse, widow, or widower, of a veteran may be able to claim the preference if the veteran is unable to use the preference. **The interview selection for eligible spouses/dependents should mirror the requirements outlined in Senate Bill 805.** This benefit would align with the Gold Star Fathers Act of 2015, which extended the hiring preferences for federal civil positions to fathers with the same.
2. Aligning the state Veteran Preference with the federal program will assist in alleviating confusion between the two levels of government and the benefits derived from military service.

The workgroup agrees that in order to ensure the best interest of the veteran that the Veterans Hiring Preference should have transfer ability if the veteran is deemed unemployable by the Veterans Administration (VA).

3. The priority in which the state's Veterans Hiring Preference would be applied would be in the following order:
  - a. a veteran, including a veteran with a disability
  - b. veteran's surviving spouse who has not remarried
  - c. an orphan of a veteran if the veteran was killed while on active duty
  - d. spouse of a veteran with a unemployability rating with a total disability rating between 70% to 100% from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

## **Veteran Need #2**

Active-Duty Military spouses are often underemployed and experience far higher unemployment rates than their civilian counterparts.

### **Recommendation:**

Providing active-duty and Title 32 military spouses with a hiring preference for state government jobs will lower the unemployment rate of military spouses and will provide sustainable income and a better quality of life for military family members.

### **Background:**

Before the COVID Pandemic, there was a national focus on military spouse unemployment.

A January 2022 Military Times article cited that the Department of Labor estimated the military spouse unemployment rate is 3 times higher than the veteran unemployment rate. The Department of Labor estimated the military spouse unemployment rate to be 13%. Other organizations closely align with military spouses state the military spouse unemployment rate is as high as 24%. *Joining Forces' Strengthening America's Families* (September 2021) report cited a survey that found, "39 percent of military families reported discussing leaving active-duty military service because of challenges with spouse employment, and of those who had already transitioned, 32 percent cited their own work or career as a major driver in that decision."

**Military Spouse Career Journeys: Examining Entrepreneurship, Remote Work, and Upskilling as Drivers of Economic Success for Military Spouses** (United States Chamber of Commerce Hiring our Heroes & Burning Glass Technologies, September 2020).

Retention rates of active-duty military can be greatly affected by military spouse employment issues.

Reasons for the higher unemployment rates among military spouses as compared to their civilian counterparts include multiple moves related to the active-duty service member's career, not meeting licensing requirements and lengthy procedures from state-to-state, lack of employment opportunities that provide flexible work schedules, and reluctance of employers to hire military spouses due to the frequent relocation among military families.

Military spouses are educated, talented and hard working. The military family often counts on the income of a civilian spouse for the military family to make ends meet. Military spouses that are career driven often must sacrifice their careers for the service member to remain in the



military. In many situations, if the spouse does not find gainful fulfilling employment, this leads to the service member exiting the service hurting retention. Several years ago, the federal government developed a military spouse hiring preference to support retention and sustainable income for the family.

The workgroup agrees that adding a Military Spouse Hiring Preference, to the existing Veterans Hiring Preference is in the best interest of the military family and demonstrates how the State of Texas is working to solve unemployment for military spouses residing on or near military installations in Texas.

4. To qualify for the hiring preference, the spouse's service member must be on active duty.
5. The priority in which the State's Veterans Hiring preference would be applied would be in the following order:
  - a. a veteran, including a veteran with a disability
  - b. veteran's surviving spouse who has not remarried
  - c. an orphan of a veteran if the veteran was killed while on active duty
  - d. spouse of a veteran with a unemployability rating with a total disability rating between 70 to 100 from the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.
  - e. Military spouses of an active-duty veteran including National Guard and Reserve Service Members on active duty.

### **Veteran Need #3**

There is an ongoing need to streamline the information for Occupational Licensing requirements in Texas, for military service members, military spouses, transitioning service members and veterans.

### **Recommendation:**

The workgroup agrees that an Occupational Licensing Page should be established on the Governor's Veterans Web Portal. The page should list all the state's occupational licensing authorities and what they license. The licensing agencies or regulatory bodies would provide a link on their webpage that would direct the military service member, military spouses, transitioning service members and veterans to the agency's specific Military Licensing page that would provide information on how to apply for and obtain the Texas license in that occupational field. Each licensing agency or regulatory bodies would provide a detailed process of how to apply for their specific occupational license.

### **Background:**

Texas is second in the nation for veteran population, combined with the population aboard it's numerous military installations. Over the past several Texas Legislative sessions numerous bills were passed related to occupation licensing for military service members, military spouses, and veterans.

- 86<sup>th</sup> R SB 1200: Relating to the authority of certain military spouses to engage in a business or occupation in this state.

- 86<sup>th</sup> R HB 971: Relating to proficiency certification of law enforcement officers with military service.
- 83<sup>Rd</sup> R SB 61: The bill amends the Occupations Code relating to the licensing and regulation of military physicians who provide voluntary charity health care.
- 83<sup>rd</sup>(R) SB 242: Relating to the eligibility requirements for certain occupational licenses issued to applicants with military experience,
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R) SB 162: Relating to the occupational licensing of spouses of members of the military and the eligibility requirements for certain occupational licenses issued to applicants with military experience.
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R)HB 1960: Relating to reciprocity for emergency medical services personnel certification for certain United States military personnel.
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R) HB 2254: Relating to apprenticeship requirements for occupational licenses issued to applicants with military experience.
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R) HB 2135: Relating to waivers and grants of credit for the requirements to obtain certain private security licenses to individuals who hold security credentials from the United States armed forces.
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R)HB 2028: Relating to the eligibility requirements for plumbing licenses issued to applicants with military service.
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R) HB 2029: Relating to the eligibility requirements for electrician licenses issued to applicants with military experience.
- 83<sup>rd</sup> (R)SB 229: Relating to an exception to the domicile requirement for issuance of a commercial driver's license for certain military personnel. SB229 can be used as the precedent for the Texas Legislature to enact further legislation regarding the occupational licensing or certifications of service members, veterans and spouses who meet the eligibility requirements across state lines.
- 84<sup>th</sup> R SB 389: Which requires state agencies to place corresponding military occupation specialty codes on each of their job postings.
- 84<sup>th</sup> R SB 807: Waives the state license application and examination fees for military members, Veterans, and their spouses.
- 84<sup>th</sup> R SB 1307: Ensures that every military spouse, Veteran, and servicemember gets credit for their skills and have their occupational licenses expedited.

Texas has done its part in passing the legislation to address the occupational licensing for military service members, military spouses, and veterans. The main issue is the difficulty in finding the information because it is disjointed and fragmented.

#### **Veteran Need #4**

There is a need to increase the number of veterans hired by state agencies to accomplish the 20 percent goal, as required by the Texas Government Code, Section 657.004.

#### **Recommendation:**

The workgroup agrees to increase the focus on State Agencies increasing the number of Veterans in their workforce.

The workgroup makes the following recommendations:

1. State agencies who have not met the 20% goal of veterans in their workforce must designate 10% of posted positions for veterans only, for five business days. If the position is not filled with by a veteran on the first posting, the position would be open to the public on the second posting. Agency determines the positions
2. State agencies who have not met the 20% goal of veterans in their workforce must hire or designate Veteran Recruitment and Retention Specialist(s) who conducts outreach activities and oversees recruiting requirements to promote veteran recruitment and retention for the agency until the agency meets the goal of 20%, as follows:
  - less than 500 employees, must hire or designate at least a part-time Veteran Recruitment and Retention Specialist;
  - 500 or more employees must hire or designate at least a full-time Veteran Recruitment and Retention Specialist.
3. State agency HR Directors, Veteran Liaisons and Veteran Recruitment and Retention Specialist would undergo a virtual or in-person training seminar on the DoD Skillsbridge program. The purpose of the training is to educate HR Directors Veteran Liaisons, and Veteran Recruitment and Retention Specialist on the benefits of participating in the DoD Skillsbridge program to identify talent to fill their workforce.
4. Disabled Veterans will count as 1.5 full-time equivalent employees towards the 20% goal of veterans within a state agencies workforce.
5. Add to the state application a statement that informs service-connected disabled veterans that in order to receive disabled veteran hiring preference they must provide proof of service-connected disability

**Background:**

The 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature passed SB 805 establishing the state agencies to have a goal of 20% of their workforce comprised of U.S. Military Veterans. SB 389 also was passed by the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature that listed military occupational specialty codes on certain state agency employment openings. State agencies have made limited progress in reaching the 20% goal set forth by the Texas Legislature. According to the 2022 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter Veteran Workforce Summary Reports, the percentage of veterans employed by the State of Texas is 6.03% 1<sup>st</sup> QTR 2022, 5.98% 2<sup>nd</sup> QTR 2022, and 5.94% 3<sup>rd</sup> QTR 2022. The State of Texas is well short of the goal of 20%.

Several private employers across the country have hired military veterans as Veteran Recruiters for their companies. The veteran recruiter can translate veteran’s knowledge, skills and abilities to other human resources staff members and to hiring managers. Veteran Recruiters work one on one with veterans to help them understand how to apply for the company’s positions by

explaining the resume, application, interview and hiring process. The veteran recruiter also works to maintain the retention of veterans within the company.

With all the military installations in Texas, Texas State agencies have an opportunity to participate in the DoD Skillbridge program. The DoD Skillbridge program provides transitioning service members an opportunity to conduct an internship with employers during their last 4 to 6 months of military service. Texas Veterans Commission and Texas workforce Commission have staff who work on the military installations who can assisted in connecting the transitioning service members with internship opportunities with Texas State Agencies. This provides Texas State agencies a chance to use the Veteran Direct Hire provision already in the Government code to hire the transition service member/veteran.

# *Higher Education Workgroup*

## Higher Education Workgroup

### Veteran Need #1

Student veterans and other eligible persons do not have knowledge of the grievance and adjudication processes available at their Institution of Higher Education (IHEs), regarding the awarding of the Hazlewood Act tuition exemption.

### Recommendation:

To assist Hazlewood Act applicants, this workgroup recommends all Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) inform all applicants seeking tuition exemption under the Hazlewood Act of the grievance and adjudication processes available should the exemption be denied. It is recommended that IHEs provide a fact sheet to each applicant identifying the roles and responsibilities of each party identified in the IHE's process; procedures for submitting a grievance; timeline for the grievance process; and authority of the IHE to adjudicate the grievance. This workgroup recommends that rule-making authority be granted to the appropriate state agency to develop administrative rules to support this recommendation, and that no matter which agency is granted that authority that TVC and THECB consult in developing the rules. The identified agency would prescribe the form and manner in which the notification is to be provided to an applicant and will prescribe the criteria and elements of the notification.

### Veteran Need #2

Hazlewood Eligibility criteria is not applied in a standardized manner amongst the schools in Texas, and the current legislative language is confusing for IHE administrators and Hazlewood Act beneficiaries utilizing the benefit.

### Recommendation:

Legislature should revise Tex. Ed. Code Section 54.341 and 54.2001 utilizing clear, concise, and declarative language to explain how a veteran qualifies for the Hazlewood Act benefit, maintains eligibility, and under what conditions the benefit may be passed to a Legacy child, a child with own hours, a spouse, and under what specific conditions the benefit will be denied.

### Veteran Need #3

Veterans and IHEs will greatly benefit from a central repository for Hazlewood Act benefit eligibility records, documents, and applications.

### Recommendation:

The Legislature should appropriate funds for the Texas Veterans Commission to develop a database that allows veterans to upload all documents used for Hazlewood Act qualification (DD

Form 214, marriage certificate, birth certificate, certificates of eligibility, etc.) into a central repository utilized by all IHEs. These documents would then be available to all IHEs for reference if the student transfers beneficiaries to a different school, changes category or qualification (Legacy to child with own hours) and streamlines the application process for both and IHE administrative staff (saving time and money for the IHE). The database should meet all security, DIR and FERPA standards.

#### **Veteran Need #4**

There is a need to update the Texas Education Code to reflect equality.

#### **Recommendation:**

In enacting programs to benefit veterans, the Legislature should keep in mind to refer to all veterans and to revise current statutes to be inclusive of all veterans' groups. A specific example is in Tex. Ed. Code Section 51.304, which should be revised to reflect all veterans and not specific genders.

# *Criminal Justice Workgroup*



## Criminal Justice Workgroup

### Veteran Need #1

Increased access to veteran status for justice involved veterans.

### Recommendation:

- Revise language in current statute-Govt Code 511.009(17)
- Revise automated system in place-Veterans Check via TLETS

### Veteran Need #2

Currently there is no standard recidivism rate definition in Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC). Effectiveness for courts is generally based on recidivism and having a standard, uniform definition would make a stronger case for increasing funding.

### Recommendation:

Texas should add a standard definition of recidivism in the Veterans Treatment Court Statute. The Texas Judicial Council should direct the Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) to develop guidelines to establish a uniform recidivism rate definition for veteran's treatment courts for adoption by the Council; and, require OCA to compile the recidivism data for a 10-year period.

### Veteran Need #3

Incarcerated veterans need access to veteran specific mental health, substance use and peer support programming and services while incarcerated and upon release to the community.

### Recommendation:

Recommend increased collaboration amongst state agencies, institutions of higher learning, and local veterans support organizations, including volunteer and faith-based organizations, to provide support and funding for veteran specific PODS/Dorms and county jails.

### Veteran Need #4

Criminal Justice professionals may not be well trained in veteran needs.

### Recommendation:

The passing of the Sandra Bland Act (2017) requires all Texas LEOs to be trained in 40 hours of Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) as part of their basic peace officer course.

The state should encourage/require that Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) 4067, Trauma Affected Veterans, Criminal Justice professionals become a mandatory class for all Criminal Justice Professionals with four or more years of service to create a safer environment for both veterans and LEO in Texas.

# *Housing Workgroup*

# Housing Workgroup

## **Veteran Need #1:**

Texas Tax Code 11.22(b) which provides a property tax exemption to disabled veterans, has not been revised since 2001 to account for economic inflation, the increase in cost of living, and housing costs.

## **Recommendation:**

Modify Texas Tax Code 11.22 (b) to be indexed for inflation.

## **Background:**

Many Texas veterans on fixed incomes struggle to meet the significant rise in home values. This is a cause for concern due to the associated increase in property taxes. Disabled veterans who are currently living in Texas and have a VA disability rating may meet the eligibility requirements for property tax reduction. Disabled veterans who meet the qualifications outlined in the Texas Tax Code 11.22 may receive an exemption of up to \$12,000 off the value of one piece of property they own for tax purposes. The following schedule, as outlined in Tax Code 11.22(b), is used to determine a disabled veteran's exemption:

<b>An exemption of up to:</b>	<b>At least:</b>	<b>But less than:</b>
\$5,000 of assessed value	10%	30%
\$7,500	30%	50%
\$10,000	50%	70%
\$12,000	70% and over	

Therefore, a disabled veteran living in Texas who owns a home and is rated by the VA at 60% service-connected disability would be eligible to receive a \$10,000 reduction off the value of their home for property tax purposes. The dollar amounts used in the above schedule were set by HB 2812 (77th Legislature, 2001) and have not been adjusted since then. Currently, Texas Tax Code 11.131 provides full property relief for Texas veterans, who have a 100% VA disability rating due to a service-connected disability.

## **Veteran Need #2**

Veterans and their families who are experiencing or are at-risk for homelessness would benefit from a statewide risk mitigation collaborative program preventing homelessness.

## **Recommendation:**

The creation of a statewide risk mitigation fund by local governments, similar to those used in other states such as Florida, could be used by private property owners who wish to serve "at-risk" and low-income veterans and their families. Funds would be available to offset financial losses encountered by property owners who participate in the program and serve eligible veterans.

## **Background:**

Risk mitigation funds can be an effective tool for encouraging landlords to rent to tenants they consider to be high-risk, like veterans transitioning out of homelessness. In 2016, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) conducted a study of successful risk mitigation funds established in four major metropolitan areas. Their findings are available at: <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/engaging-landlords-risk-mitigation-funds-communityprofiles>. A risk mitigation fund will provide housing for tenants with low-income, evictions, poor credit, those experiencing chronic homelessness and criminal records for Texas veterans and their families to have suitable housing.

Within Texas, households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing with those earning less than \$50,000 are more likely to be cost burdened. The constricted rental markets create greater competition for individuals and families seeking a limited number of affordable units. This is a greater challenge for those families with low rental capital, homelessness, joblessness, substance abuse and mental illness. Landlord risk mitigation funds are strategic in providing financial guarantees for landlords who rent to individuals with additional housing barriers. Local governments would work with the Chamber of Commerce to establish and manage the mitigation program and input from local apartment associations. Monitoring would be conducted by a state entity or local agency that provides statewide housing oversight. The methods of funding can be generated through donations, city government, code enforcement revenue, a regional mayors' caucus, private donors, local property management firms, and the county, city and the United Way. A landlord/tenant liaison office would be established to manage landlord, agency, and tenant participation, outreach and claims processing. This landlord/tenant liaison office would be staffed by a local non-profit specialized in homelessness, with logistical support from the city government and financial support from the city and Chamber of Commerce. Agency participation is established through coordinated intake systems or signed agreements with its landlord liaison staff. The funds would cover deposits and administration fees, property damage (after deposit is applied), unpaid rent, damages for breach of a lease and unit holding fees. The payouts would assist in covering a half of monthly rent (up to \$600) to hold a unit, an established minimum amount for property damage with minimal verification, with \$2,000 (± \$1,000) additional on a case-by-case basis. These funds would be available to Department of Housing and Urban Development - Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) participants, veterans and their families with barriers to suitable housing.

## **Veteran Need #3**

Affordable Housing solution that would assist homeless veteran, justice involved or “Hard to place Veterans” and seniors.

## **Recommendation:**

Several communities nationwide have reutilized surplus government property and buildings to permanently house Veterans and low-income families with great success. Texas is fortunate to have similar untapped resources and facilities to meet this growing need now, and in the

foreseeable future. This workgroup recommends reutilizing surplus government property and buildings to permanently house Veterans and low-income families.

### **Background:**

Unfortunately, major cities in Texas and the nation have a large undersupply of affordable housing stock for low-income veterans and their families and individual veterans with barriers such as criminal records, disabilities, little or no income, and those who require intensive case management to sustain their housing.

Several buildings could be listed on the National Historic Landmarks record making them eligible for preservation funds, grants, and federal tax incentives. Additional funding sources: City, State, County (ESG and CDBG), HUD, VA, Corporate, Private, Internal program development (Janitorial and Landscaping businesses) & Rents. Federal Grants such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), HVRP & IVTP can also provide funds for clients.

The burden and challenge for non-profit services providers has always been to identify housing options for those who only qualify for 16% of the available market. Most apartment complexes require three times the rental amount in income which prevents those on disability or social security from acquiring customary affordable housing. For example, a Senior Citizen on a fixed income would only qualify for an apartment rental rate of \$400 a month if their retirement benefit is just \$1,200. Outside of traditional senior housing which has a long wait list, the options are extremely limited for single seniors especially those who are transitioning from owning a home to an apartment for the first time.

While the homeless veteran population has stabilized to some extent, a need is still there for low income housing options. The average age for homeless veterans is 55 years old with an income at or below \$1,000 a month from VA or Social Security benefits. Again, housing options remain limited due to income or the inability to qualify for additional VA and Social Security Benefits. While the recidivism rate remains low, those returning to homelessness expressed their desire to living among fellow veterans who understand their needs and can provide peer support. This is understandable when you consider that the most effective programs in the United States for homeless and at-risk veterans are community-based, nonprofit, “Veterans helping Veterans” organizations. Programs that do work best, feature permanent housing with the camaraderie of living in structured, substance-free environments, with fellow veterans who are succeeding at bettering themselves.

Within the last several years, a new demographic has emerged as more community colleges have requested assistance with housing or sheltering some of their students. Recent estimates suggest that close to 5% of community college students are veterans. Because community colleges do not offer dormitories, those students who cannot afford an apartment are forced to stay with friends or family for short durations or live on the streets or in shelters. This unseen homeless population has been overlooked for years and is rarely reported outside of anonymous surveys and is exceptionally hard to identify these individuals during the annual Point in Time (PIT) Count of the homeless population. Unfortunately, these students would not qualify for most housing programs, and shelters are not an ideal or suitable long-term housing option for college students.

There is a clear and identifiable need for an alternative housing solution that will meet the social, economic, and environmental needs of senior citizens, veterans, college students, and individuals who require permanent supportive housing on a limited income. Regrettably there are no alternative housing options currently available to support this population but a possible solution.

Some government buildings were designed as the Bachelor Officer Quarters (BOQ). These buildings are quite adequate to be reutilized as Permanent and Transitional Housing with office space available to offer supportive services not only to the residents, but the community in whole. It could be possible to assign floors and wings to designate groups like seniors, veterans, or students. Most of the rooms offer a living space with individual bathroom, kitchenette, refrigerator, microwave, and furniture. Also located on each residential floor are domestic kitchens and several laundry rooms for the residents.

The acreage surrounding the area can be appealing to all the aforementioned groups. Veterans will instantly recognize the area as former military and find it not only familiar and peaceful, but also like returning home. Seniors would enjoy the tranquility of the vast open spaces, the security and privacy of the facilities, and abundant community activities. College students would quickly identify the area as a major college campus and its appeal as a stress-free lifestyle complete with ample indoor and outdoor recreational facilities. By utilizing the upper-level floors in a building as residential apartments, the first floor would be available for supportive services. Individual agencies would be able to provide additional housing programs, medical clinics, financial support, case management, mental health counseling, transportation, and other supportive care. Like similar facilities across the country, a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic could be located on site as well as benefits enrollment. The larger spaces in both buildings could also be used for satellite college classrooms, senior activities, vocational rehabilitation, or rented out for community events.

The potential for these two buildings is unlimited in terms of permanent or transitional housing. It meets or exceeds the current demand for low-income individual housing units and bridges the gap between residents and access to social services by consolidating resources on site. The benefit of such a master planned community is immeasurable to the residents and reduces the overall economic impact on taxpayers and limited community resources as seen in similar projects.

Several communities nationwide have reutilized surplus government property and buildings to permanently house veterans and low-income families with great success. Texas is fortunate to have similar untapped resources and facilities to meet this growing need now, and in the foreseeable future. Organizations and agencies will be briefed on this project and will be encouraged by its potential and the concept of a consolidated resource center that encompasses alternative permanent housing for such a wide demographic.

#### **Veteran Need #4**

Homeless veterans require a method of communication to access benefits they have earned.

#### **Recommendation:**

Request that the Texas Legislature examine the possibility of coordination with public and private sources to provide internet accessible phones to veterans.

## **Background:**

Homeless veterans obviously lack stable housing which precludes government agencies and nonprofit organizations from mailing information and forms about programs of assistance. This places a greater emphasis on the need for homeless veterans to have internet accessible phones, as well as reasonable data plans, allowing them to have access to information as well as communication with agencies of assistance.

A fairly recent study from the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans & Military Families at Syracuse University said: "Using mobile communication as a mechanism for more consistent communication with healthcare and other service providers could help improve homeless veterans overall health and wellbeing. Therefore, homeless veterans who have trouble maintaining contact with healthcare providers should request mobile communication assistance. Counselors and social workers who work with homeless veterans should inquire on their veteran's mobile usage to determine if a mobile-based plan of communication would be beneficial. If veterans report having irregular access to mobile communications, counselors and social workers should identify barriers to access and work with veterans to devise a contingency plan for contact, including when their mobile device is out of service, lost, or stolen. Service provider offices should consider offering mobile and internet technology services to homeless veterans and other at-risk populations.

Ensuring that homeless veterans have reliable communication methods as well as access to important benefits and assistance information would improve their physical and mental health outcomes.

# *Transportation Workgroup*



# Transportation Workgroup

## Veteran Need #1

Veterans need reliable transportation options for accessing VA medical services.

### Recommendation:

- The VA, VA medical facilities, and regional transit providers should establish formal relationships for communication and coordination to increase access to transportation and promote public/veteran awareness of existing transportation resources available within their community.
- As a component of that effort, encourage public transit providers to provide a reduced fare to veterans throughout the state.
- Address gaps in mental health services to veterans, including rural veterans, through further development and improvement in state telemedicine programs.
- Encourage public transit providers to create more services that provide access to Veterans Health Services and to consider those services in future planning.
- Encourage the 24 planning regions to coordinate and integrate services across regions to provide veterans transportation to and from health care.
- Encourage public private partnership with ride sharing companies to offer subsidized or discounted fares to disabled veterans who are traveling to medical appointments.

## Veteran Need #2

Veterans need reliable transportation options for accessing work.

### Recommendation:

- As a component of that effort, encourage public transit providers to provide a reduced fare to veterans throughout the state.
- Encourage public-private partnership with ride sharing companies to offer subsidized or discounted fares to disabled veterans who are traveling to employment appointments.
- Encourage rural public transit providers to coordinate and work with employers to provide veterans access to employment.

- Encourage the 24 planning regions to coordinate and integrate services across regions to provide veterans transportation to and from places of employment.
- Encourage rural public transit providers to extend operating hours for veterans to access transportation to and from places of employment.
- Encourage public private partnership with ride sharing companies to offer subsidized or discounted fares to veterans who are traveling to and from places of employment.

### **Veteran Need #3**

Local governments, communities, and service organizations that provide transportation services to veterans need access to funding and resources to ensure the sustainability of their programs, especially in rural areas.

### **Recommendation:**

- Veterans can benefit from non-veteran specific transportation resources and funding provided by various state and federal agencies.
- Prioritize statewide and regional efforts to ensure the needs of veterans (and other members of the public), agency services, and agency resources are coordinated for maximum service delivery, sustainability, and efficiency.
- Pursue inter-agency partnerships to identify opportunities in federal discretionary grant programs to submit competitive applications.

*Women Veterans  
Workgroup*

# Women Veterans Workgroup

## Veteran Need #1

Homeless and low-income women veterans, especially those with children, would benefit from affordable housing.

## Recommendations:

1. Entities of the state which provide services to women veterans seeking housing should be required to ask during intake, “Did you serve in the armed forces?” to better identify available options.
2. State agencies providing housing services to veterans should provide ADA-compliant and eligibility criteria to women veterans and their families.
3. All homeless veterans’ information available should be offered in a manner which empowers veterans to be in charge of their situations.

## Background:

In the VA’s report, *The Past, Present and Future of Women Veterans*, released February 2017, a GAO study found limited housing for women veterans with children as a barrier when accessing and finding housing. In a recent issue of *Task & Purpose*, it was reported that women veterans face a greater risk of becoming homeless — 2.4% — compared to male veterans and there is an inadequate supply of affordable housing. In a VA report, *Housing Instability Among Women Veterans Accessing Care through the Veterans Health Administration*, released in February 2018, it is documented that “there has been a surge in the number of women Veterans...experiencing housing instability.” Additionally, the VA recognizes that, “many women Veterans face challenges when returning to civilian life, including raising children on their own or dealing with the aftereffects of military sexual trauma. Without intervention, these and other issues can put women Veterans at greater risk of homelessness.”

There is a lack of public awareness about homeless women veterans. Two contributing factors to homeless women veterans are the failure of women veterans to 1) self-identify as veteran, and 2) ask for help. Additionally, homeless women veterans are more likely to live with friends or in their vehicles for fear of being in proximity to men (especially if they have suffered some form of sexual trauma), or if they have children, fear of losing them. These women do not get counted in the yearly Point-in-Time count conducted by the Department of Labor. If women do not request housing assistance, it is understandable that there are few shelters or housing for women and women with children. For those women who do step forward, the amount of safe shelter or housing available to them is limited or non-existent.

Access to shelter and housing is hindered by a lack of the unknown: What types of services are available? Where are the services? What are the eligibility criteria? Will women veterans lose custody of their children to agencies such as Child Protective Services if they seek help for

housing? While we openly market the host of services available to veterans from claims counseling to employment, there is not much marketing for shelter or housing.

Currently, homeless and low-income women veterans have a few options through federal programs to obtain assistance for homelessness. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH) partner to provide permanent, supportive housing and treatment services for homeless veterans. One of the focuses of the HUD-VASH Program is to provide special services for women Veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs' Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program VA awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives who can provide supportive services to very low-income veteran families living in or transitioning to permanent housing.

The Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Programs additionally offers a Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program annually (as funding permits) to fund community agencies providing services to homeless Veterans. The program promotes the development and provision of supportive housing and/or supportive services with the goal of helping homeless veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income, and obtain greater self-determination. Only programs with supportive housing (up to 24 months) or service centers (offering services such as case management, education, crisis intervention, counseling, services targeted towards specialized populations including homeless women veterans, etc.) are eligible for these funds.

Moving forward, marketing the available services while answering questions that may hinder women veterans from seeking services may increase the use of services. We should seek to change the language when marketing services to women veterans. Instead of asking “Are you a veteran?” we should be asking “Did you serve in the armed forces?” or “Have you served in the military?” Lastly, we need to change the current vision of the hopeless-homeless veteran seeking a handout to a resilient-warrior seeking support. A new public awareness campaign about what a veteran looks like, female, fierce, and with children, will not only engage veterans, but the public.

## **Veteran Need #2**

Veterans in Texas would benefit from information on how to obtain affordable and accessible childcare.

## **Recommendations:**

1. State agencies and public institutions of higher learning that provide services to veterans should make readily available in an easily accessible format childcare information and options to veterans and their families.
2. Establish more childcare facilities for veterans with incentives.

## **Background:**

In the 2016, TVC Veteran Needs Assessment report prepared by Texas State University, the lack of childcare was cited as an unmet need of women veterans. The nonprofit advocacy group, Child Care Aware of America, reported that Texas has 20 to 29 childcare centers for every 1000 children, ranking among the lowest in the country. In the same report, rural and poorer communities are identified as “childcare deserts.” Veterans, especially low-income, single parent, and millennials—an increasing population among the veteran community—have the greatest need, but have the least access to affordable, quality childcare.

The Foundation for Women Warriors, a unique support organization created exclusively for the women veteran community of Southern California, has developed a specific childcare program focused on serving women seeking employment or in school. Identifying this same type of program in Texas has been unsuccessful.

Childcare assistance websites associated with the various workforce solution centers across the state provide eligibility requirements and on-line applications, but some websites are difficult to find, difficult to navigate, and lack consistency in appearance across the state.

The VA piloted a childcare drop-in service for veterans with medical appointments and the Dallas VA, one of the pilot sites, continues to provide this service. Replicating this model in all VA facilities, especially those that have women’s clinics would be beneficial to veterans. Lack of access to affordable childcare can be self-imposed because a veteran does not ask about childcare. When veterans seek to further their education, or begin to look for work, they take on the challenge of finding childcare on their own, not asking the person filing their benefits claim or helping them with their resume about childcare options. Eligibility criteria is another barrier to access. Veterans who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder/military sexual trauma (PTSD/MST) and may not have a VA diagnosis for a disability rating.

## **Veteran Need #3**

Women veterans would benefit from being able to participate in groups comprised of their peers

## **Recommendations:**

Recommend further funding support for additional non-profits and veterans service organizations that currently operate or are capable of creating effective women veteran peer groups that will expand services by the number of peer groups available and increase the connection among women veterans.

## **Discussion:**

Texas has the largest women veteran population in the country with an estimated 193,000 women veterans and growing. Women veterans continue to settle their families across the state

in vastly populated areas, as well as rural areas. Women veterans typically miss the camaraderie they experienced during their military service, so they seek that camaraderie by connecting with women veteran peer groups.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, joining a peer support group can help veterans feel better in a number of ways, such as: knowing that others are going through something similar; learning tips on how to handle day-to-day challenges; meeting new friends or connecting to others who understand; learning how to talk about things that bother them or how to ask for help; learning to trust other people; and hearing about helpful new perspectives from others.

Texas women veterans have benefitted from participating in peer groups offered by the Women Veterans Network (WoVeN). WoVeN is a national, peer support network led by women veterans, for women veterans; it's a foundational 8-week program is designed to enhance wellness, quality of life, family relationships, and career satisfaction by building strong connections among women Veterans. Texas women veterans that participated in WoVeN peer groups went on to become peer leaders to help more women veterans connect. In the past, Texas Veterans Commission Women Veterans Program supported WoVeN by recruiting and sponsoring 8 rural Texas women veterans to participate in the 2-day peer leader training. The peer leader training resulted in increasing the number of peer groups available in rural areas as well as increasing the opportunities for women veterans to connect with their peers.

Additionally, local organizations and Texas Veterans Commission Fund for Veterans' Assistance grantees like Grace After Fire have provided peer-to-peer support groups to women veterans through their Table Talk: Color Me Camo peer support system. Grace After Fire is a nonprofit that provide the means for women veterans to gain self-knowledge and self-renewal. The purpose of their Table Talk: Color Me Camo program is for peers to help peers with the objective to get veterans well by talking to each other and to establish a bond amongst the veterans in their local areas. The overall goal should result in healthy women, healthy families, and healthy communities.

#### **Veteran Need #4**

Women veterans would benefit from being able to participate in a veteran's employment job fair with early entry for women veterans.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Recommend additional state funding for veteran employment job fairs, offering early entry to women veterans.
- Recommend funding specifically for childcare organizations to provide care for children during the job fair.

## **Discussion:**

With the largest population of women veterans in the nation, Texas women veterans are constantly seeking self-improvement for a better-quality life. Many research studies state that employment or finding a job contributes to overall well-being. According to TVC's 2020 Women Veterans Report, over 12,000 women veterans sought employment assistance from September 2018 to August 2020. Women veterans are in the job market and requesting assistance with finding employment, but some find it challenging. According to an infographic released by Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families in March 2020, 43 percent of recently separated women veterans reported "finding employment" as a transition challenge. The Wounded Warrior Project's Women Warriors Initiative Report, released in March 2021, 22 percent of women veterans reported "finding employment" as a challenge. Additionally, women veterans reported that more mentorship, outreach, education, training, and assistance navigating the federal hiring process would be helpful. Additionally, women veteran unemployment rate is always little higher than their male counterparts. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, in June 2021, women veteran unemployment was at 5.5 percent compared to men veterans at 4.7 percent. Additionally, in June 2022, women veteran unemployment was at 3.0 percent compared to men veterans at 2.7 percent.

Childcare during the job fair would be helpful to unemployed as well as underemployed women veterans attending the job fair. As previously stated in Unmet Need #2, "veterans, especially low-income, single parent, and millennials have the greatest need, but have the least access to affordable, quality childcare."



*Pro Bono Legal  
Services Workgroup*

## **Pro Bono Legal Services Workgroup**

The State of Texas has continued to show support for basic civil legal services for veterans. The Supreme Court of Texas grants funds to the Texas Access to Justice Foundation (TAJF), which is the leading funder of legal aid in Texas. TAJF funds nonprofit organizations which offer free civil legal services to low-income Texans. The 87th Texas Legislative session resulted in TAJF receiving an additional \$1 million in General Revenue funds from the previous session (bringing the total to 7 million for biennium) for Legal Aid for Veterans (LAV).

TAJF supports 21 grants for 14 grantees that provide veteran legal services with funding from the Legislature, proceeds from the annual fundraising gala and other donations. TAJF funds 5 bar association veteran pro bono programs and 3 law school veteran clinical programs which all utilize pro bono attorneys.

In the last three years, almost 21,000 veterans were served by TAJF funded legal aid programs in Texas, and during the most recent full grant year, 11,162 clinics, workshops and presentations assisted more than 31,000 veterans. Civil legal aid and pro bono programs across Texas provide much needed legal services to veterans ranging from VA disability, health/mental health, family law, probate issues, consumer debt to income maintenance/public benefits.

Additionally, TAJF sponsors Equal Justice Works Fellows annually and has sponsored fellows who have partnered with legal aid to work exclusively on veterans issues. In September 2022, as the Inaugural Terry O. Tottenham Veterans Justice Fellow, Allen Martin of Pepperdine University Rick J. Caruso School of Law will be working for Texas Legal Services Center in Austin to mitigate veteran homelessness and poor health by creating a Medical Legal Partnership at Cedar Park Veterans Affairs Clinic (CPVAC) to meet legal needs for eviction/foreclosure defense, discharge upgrades, financial security, and familial stability.

Although there are successful programs to assist veterans with their legal needs, veterans will benefit from additional legal services. According to the Legal Services Corporation's [2022 Justice Gap Report](#), low-income Americans did not receive any or enough legal help for 92 percent of their substantial civil legal problems. Additionally, individuals from veteran households did not receive any or enough legal help for 84 percent of substantial problems.

The Pro Bono Legal Services Veterans Workgroup has identified the following unmet veterans legal needs:

### **Veteran Need #1**

Veterans would benefit from deferred adjudication agreements in Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs), and increased funding and pro bono focus on facilitating civil expunctions and nondisclosures.

### **Recommendation:**

Veteran Treatment Courts should adopt uniform policies and procedures. Veterans who successfully complete VTC programs should have their charges automatically dismissed and expunged. Veterans should not be required to plead guilty or no contest to qualify for VTC programs.

The workgroup also recommends a mechanism for the waiver of fees and associated costs for veterans who file for expunction and nondisclosure of their criminal and arrest records. There should be increased funding for VTCs and other non-profit entities that assist veterans in determining whether they are entitled to expunctions and nondisclosures, properly drafting and filing the necessary paperwork to initiate and complete their cases and providing representation in those cases.

### **Background:**

VTCs are specialized courts established to specifically address the needs of veterans facing criminal charges, diverting them from incarceration into treatment. VTCs rely on the cooperation and collaboration between the criminal justice system, Veterans Courts, Veteran's Affairs, community agencies and veterans. VTCs require the judge, prosecutor and defense counsel to collaboratively pursue a path that will help solve the issues the veteran may be experiencing. Partnerships between legal service programs and VTCs to expand VTCs across Texas is needed.

According to the Office of the Governor, as of July 2019, there were 30 VTCs in Texas. Within each VTC there are different eligibility and procedural requirements, which include the following:

1. the veteran must be a resident of the county in which the VTC operates or have a pending eligible offense in that county (some VTCs handle only misdemeanor cases, while others handle both misdemeanor and felony cases), and
2. the veteran must have a traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, or other mental illness or disorder that resulted from military service and materially affected the veteran's criminal conduct at issue.

The veteran's participation in a VTC program should likely achieve the objective of ensuring public safety through rehabilitation of the veteran. VTC applications are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and many factors are considered, including prior convictions.

Veterans who participate in VTC programs receive substance abuse and mental health treatment, counseling services, housing assistance, and needed resources to become productive citizens. Veterans also build supportive, healthy relationships with other veterans in the program. However, some VTCs require veterans to plead guilty to the offense and veterans are convicted of the offense, even if they successfully complete the program. Also, not all VTC programs have a streamlined process to allow veterans to file for expunctions and nondisclosures after successfully completing the program. This makes it difficult for attorneys to assist in such cases.

VTCs best serve veterans when the goal is to divert veterans from incarceration into treatment. Therefore, if a veteran successfully completes a VTC program, the charges should be automatically

dismissed and expunged. Veterans should not be required to plead guilty or no contest to qualify for VTC programs.

The Travis County Veterans Treatment Court Track 1 Dismissal Program is an example of a successful VTC program. The Travis County VTC program is a 12 to 24-month program and has 3 levels. Each participant is required to successfully promote through each of the 3 levels. The Travis County VTC has a two-track system; Track 1 Dismissal and Track 2 Adjudicated. For Track 1, a plea is not required, and the bond conditions are changed to reflect participation in the Veterans Court program. When the dismissal is signed, the VTC defense counsel files the expungement which the judge signs. The expungement process is streamlined so it is easily taken care of immediately following the graduating veteran's final court proceeding. On the other hand, Track 2, involves probated cases and veterans are required to successfully complete probation along with the Veterans Court.

Additionally, in certain cases, Texas citizens may petition to have their criminal record expunged or they may petition for their record (including juvenile records) to be sealed through a nondisclosure order. Under Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Chapter 55, an individual may request the expunction of criminal records, and under Chapter 411 of the Texas Government Code, certain citizens may seek a nondisclosure order of their criminal and arrest records. Veterans may qualify for an expunction or a nondisclosure order depending on the crime the veteran is charged with.

A properly drafted and filed expunction or nondisclosure case can be difficult to navigate for a pro se veteran. In the 86th Legislative session, a law was passed that waives dismissal or expungement fees for veterans who successfully complete a VTC program. Nonetheless, there is a dismissal or expungement fee, which could be as high as \$5,000, for veterans who do not participate in VTCs. In Bexar County, there is a \$350-400 filing fee for expunctions not filed within 30 days of graduating a VTC program. Expunctions are very expensive due to the required service fees and process of notifying various law enforcement agencies, courts and third parties to remove records from their data base. In Harris County, there is a \$350 filing fee for the petition, and there are additional service fees for all agencies who maintain records of the charge, which can increase the cost to nearly \$400.

Veterans can suffer increased housing insecurity and joblessness due to criminal and arrest records that the veteran is qualified to expunge.

### **Veteran Need #2**

Veterans would benefit from legislation that protects their housing rights and specifically prevents credit-score reporting upon the mere filing of an eviction suit.

### **Recommendation:**

Eviction information against veterans should be confidential in situations where:

1. an eviction is never ordered,
2. the eviction is due to a foreclosure through no fault of the tenant, or

3. after a set amount of time, it is in the interest of justice (e.g., a veteran was a victim of domestic violence and flees the premises without notifying the landlord, who subsequently files for eviction not knowing the veteran was a victim of domestic violence).

### **Background:**

An eviction almost always has a negative impact on an individual's ability to secure housing in the future because most landlords perform credit checks on prospective tenants. Unfortunately, an eviction can show up on a veteran's record even if the veteran won the case or even if the landlord simply filed the case, but a judge never ordered an eviction. An eviction will also appear on a veteran's record, if they are current on their rent, but the landlord defaults on the rental property's mortgage and the bank evicts the veteran to take possession of the rental property.

If a veteran's credit report contains any mention of an eviction, regardless of its disposition or whether the eviction was based on rent or other fees owed (such as a violation of a no-pet provision in the lease), the prospective landlord will likely consider other applicants over the veteran with an eviction record. This practice places veterans at a greater risk of housing insecurity and homelessness. Eviction reporting will similarly affect veterans' future credit card applications, access to housing, and decrease the likelihood that the veteran would be approved for a mortgage or personal loan for seven years after the eviction is reported—even if the veteran was not ultimately evicted through the lawsuit.

### **Veteran Need #3**

Veterans would benefit from pro bono representation in child support cases.

### **Recommendation:**

Provide funding for pro bono programs specifically targeted towards assisting veterans in child support cases. With appropriate training and mentoring, pro bono attorneys could help bridge this justice gap.

### **Background:**

Veterans and military personnel are often referred to the HEROES program for case-specific child support assistance. The HEROES program was designed to provide family-centered child support services to veteran and military parents whose paternity or child support matters have been complicated by the realities of military service (e.g., deployments, income fluctuations and combat injuries). Through the HEROES program, veterans are partnered with a HEROES child support attorney. They receive: 1) specialized case review and management; 2) personalized assistance with paternity establishment and child support; 3) help in cases where military-related injuries have made the veteran unable to follow a court order; and 4) resources to learn how to best co-parent in unique circumstances.

The program requirements are: (1) an active child support case with Office of the Attorney General

(OAG), (2) at least one party is a resident of Texas, and (3) the person must be a veteran or active service member. The program does not consider characterization of service and there is no time limit to apply for the program. Additionally, substantiating documentation to confirm an applicant's status is not required.

HEROES Assistant Attorneys General represent the State of Texas, and the OAG is the opposing party in enforcement actions. Therefore, the program cannot and does not represent child support clients. Veterans are required to contact a private attorney or seek legal assistance through the Judge Advocate General (JAG), if they need an attorney to represent them. Additionally, the program does not assist veterans with custody and placement issues.

Due to limited resources, civil legal aid programs must place priorities on certain case types. Unless a case involves domestic violence, or other extenuating circumstances, legal aid is not usually able to provide representation in child support cases. Additionally, some veterans do not qualify for legal aid assistance under the income guidelines, which stipulates 200% of the Federal Poverty Guideline and below. Veterans who do not qualify for legal aid assistance with their child support cases potentially face arrearages, child support orders that don't take into account their changed circumstances (e.g., unemployment, disability, etc.), contempt charges for not complying with child support orders, and not getting the child support they are entitled to.

#### **Veteran Need #4**

Veterans would benefit from pro bono representation and assistance in VA Disability cases.

#### **Recommendation:**

Provide funding for pro bono programs that assist veterans in and encourage pro bono attorneys to represent veterans in VA Disability cases.

#### **Background:**

Due to the highly technical and lengthy nature of VA disability cases, few Texas attorneys make these cases a regular part of their practice. VA disability cases require extensive paperwork and are challenging for veterans to navigate on their own. Cases could take more than 2 years to resolve. Veterans will benefit from pro bono representation in initial VA disability claims, VA disability appeals, connected disability compensation applications, and disability ratings.

Baylor Law operates several legal clinics including the Baylor Law Veterans Clinic which is funded by TAJF and assists veterans with free civil litigation services and legal advice. As part of Baylor's commitment to pro bono public service, students step outside the classroom and into the community, meeting and working with veterans with real needs, under the supervision of volunteer attorneys and Baylor Law professors. Since 2012, the monthly clinics serve a veteran population of over 16,000 in McLennan County and the surrounding communities, and over 900 veterans and their families have received legal assistance through the clinics, many of whom cannot afford to hire an

attorney.

As of 2020, Baylor Law had one legal advice clinic volunteer attorney, a former VA Disability Benefits Staff Attorney, who gave excellent advice and counsel, but did not take cases for further representation. Veterans with initial VA Disability Claims were often referred to the McLennan County Veteran's Service Officer, housed where Baylor provides legal advice clinics. Given the Veteran's Service Officer's familiarity with developing claims, he is often best suited to assist and determine whether the claim has much merit. For VA Disability Appeals, veterans were referred to a Central Texas attorney.

Legal service programs should partner with pro bono attorneys and other advocates to provide assistance in VA Disability cases. Legal aid programs can offer free continuing legal education (CLE) credits or a substantial amount of training if attorneys commit to taking a specified number of pro bono cases within a year. Further, medical experts are essential in determining whether a veteran's disability is service connected. However, expert medical reports can cost \$1,300. Legal programs can partner with pro bono medical programs to assist with medical reports.

#### **Veteran Need #5**

Veterans would benefit from pro bono representation and assistance in discharge upgrade cases.

#### **Recommendation:**

Provide funding for pro bono programs that assist veterans and encourage pro bono attorneys to represent veterans in discharge upgrade cases.

#### **Background:**

More than 1.4 million veterans call Texas home. Some of these veterans face uncertain futures as they attempt to navigate the civilian world with discharge characterizations that negatively impact them economically, socially, and psychologically. A significant number of these veterans would benefit from assistance in petitioning the Department of Defense review boards for discharge upgrades because of the complex application process.

Since World War II, more than two million veterans have received less than fully honorable discharges. Since the beginning of the Gulf War in the early 90's, approximately 8% of service members have received less than fully honorable discharges. The less than fully honorable discharge characterizations result in ineligibility for veteran benefits (including monthly disability compensation, health care, housing, and educational assistance). The lack of access to these benefits is devastating to veterans, specifically combat era veterans whose discharge characterizations resulted from actions related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other related conditions.

The Department of Defense recognizes the relationship between combat deployment, subsequent mental health diagnoses, and less than fully honorable discharges. The recognition has resulted in several memorandums that provide guidance to the review boards and veterans on how these

upgrade cases should be reviewed. While this guidance is favorable to veterans, many veterans are unaware or unable to fashion comprehensive discharge upgrade applications that adequately present the evidence necessary to affect a discharge upgrade.

Discharge upgrade cases are a specialized area where pro bono attorneys and non-attorney advocates can be of great assistance in providing guidance, information, and representation to veterans. Some legal aid attorneys have partnered with large law firms to assist veterans in discharge upgrade cases.

Texas Legal Services Center (TLSC), a statewide nonprofit organization working towards civil justice for all Texans, began a coordinated Pro Bono Program in late summer 2019 and provides multi-practice area pro bono opportunities to large firms across the state. Additionally, TLSC began offering discharge upgrade training and opportunities in the fall of 2019. TLSC reached out to Pro Bono Coordinators at multiple firms, garnered interest from two large law firms, Kirkland & Ellis, and Vinson & Elkins, and subsequently partnered with two attorneys from Vinson & Elkins on a discharge upgrade case. The one-hour CLE entitled "Discharge Upgrades and Correction of Military Records" by Julian Honor, Managing Attorney of TLSC's Veterans Legal Assistance Program, is also available in an online webinar format for the general public.

This type of partnership has not only opened doors to serving more clients for TLSC, it is also establishing long-term relationships with firms who have the resources to provide meaningful support to TLSC. TLSC is already realizing substantial benefits for their clients and looks forward to growing their partnerships and offerings over time.

### **Veteran Need #6**

Veterans would benefit from increased funding for programs that address the digital divide and provide access to remote services. The concentration of most veterans services in urban and suburban locations, and limited access to transportation, further complicates and compounds legal issues for veterans in rural areas.

### **Recommendation:**

Provide funding for programs that address the digital divide and provide access to remote services especially for veterans in rural areas.

### **Background:**

Many legal service programs have developed a network of pro bono attorneys and partner with local agencies such as resource centers, libraries, hospitals, schools, etc. to disseminate legal information, host legal clinics, or provide hot spots for veterans to connect to the internet to help bridge the digital divide. For example, VetStar is the veterans services division of StarCare Specialty Health System that provides services such as Military Veterans Peer Network (MVPN). MVPN has 37-chapter locations across Texas, including rural areas, and connects veterans to a network of peers and resources in their service area. Further, the Good Samaritan Veterans



Outreach and Transition Center in San Antonio provides personalized services and referrals at no cost to veterans by partnering with veterans service providers such as San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA). It also has a resource center with over 50 computers that veterans have access to. However, most of these programs are in urban areas making it difficult for veterans living in rural counties to benefit from these programs.

According to a [2021 report](#) by the Texas Workforce Investment Council, approximately 16,500 - 29,899 veterans live in rural counties in Texas. Veterans in rural areas often do not have access to technology or do not know how to use available technology to access remote services.

To reach veterans across Texas and help address their legal needs, the Texas Veterans Legal Aid Coalition through funding from TAJF, created the Veterans Legal Matters Video Series. The videos can be found on [TexasLawHelp.org](https://www.texaslawhelp.org) and teaches veterans and their families about their rights, benefits, and legal options. Veterans who do not have access to computers, smart phones or Wi-Fi cannot benefit from resources such as the Veterans Legal Matters Video Series, remote clinics, or other helpful resources.

Additional funding is needed to purchase smartphones and computers with data plans to connect veterans in rural areas to remote services. Computers and smart phones can be pre-loaded with self-help videos to teach veterans how to use technology. Legal service programs can explore mobile veteran services where Wi-Fi enabled vehicles transport attorneys to rural areas to host clinics and assist veterans with their legal needs. This model will be beneficial to veterans with limited access to transportation, bringing legal help right to veterans' doorsteps.

It would be helpful for veteran officers who provide veterans services at the county level to be aware of veteran services provided by other counties and across the state. Frequent trainings on existing veteran services will help meet this need so that veterans can be better connected with existing services.

# *Appendix A: TCCVS Agency Information and Services*

## *Department of Family and Protective Services*

The Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) works with communities to protect children, the elderly, and people with disabilities from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. It also works to protect the health and safety of children in daycare, foster care and other types of 24-hour care. We do this through investigations, services and referrals and prevention programs.

For more information, visit the [DFPS website at www.dfps.state.tx.us](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us).

## *Texas Health and Human Services (HHS)*

Texas Health and Human Services — which includes the Texas Health and Human Services Commission and the Texas Department of State Health Services — has hundreds of programs and services that help more than 7 million Texans a month live better lives, and it's our strong foundation of dedicated people who make it happen every single day.

The Health and Human Services (HHS) mission is to maintain and improve the health and human services system in Texas and to administer its programs in accordance with the highest standards of customer service and accountability for the effective use of funds. HHS oversees the operations of the health and human services system, provides administrative oversight of Texas health and human services programs, and provides direct administration of some programs. Within HHSC, the Office of Veteran Services Coordination (OVSC) is responsible for reviewing programs and services available for Veterans and recommends ways to improve and better coordinate those services. OVSC works with staff across the HHS system as well as other state agencies, federal agencies, and community-based organizations that serve Veterans.

The Department of State Health Services is responsible for oversight and implementation of public health services in Texas. DSHS promotes optimal health for individuals and communities by preventing, detecting and responding to infectious diseases; promoting healthy lifestyles

through by disease and injury prevention; reducing health risks and threats through consumer protection; developing evidence-based public health interventions through data analysis and science; and providing medical response during disasters and emergencies.

For more information about Texas Health and Human Services visit the [HHS website at www.hhs.state.tx.us](http://www.hhs.state.tx.us) For information on the Department of State Health Services visit the [DSHS website at www.dshs.texas.gov](http://www.dshs.texas.gov).

### *Office of Public Utility Counsel*

The Office of Public Utility Counsel (OPUC) was created in 1983 in response to legislative and consumer groups concerns that residential and small commercial utility consumers were not adequately represented in utility proceedings. OPUC is charged with representing residential and small commercial consumers, as a class, in proceedings affecting utility rates and services. OPUC represents consumers' interests before the Public Utility Commission (PUC), the Texas Reliability Entity, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT), and state and federal courts.

The agency also provides information to servicemembers, veterans and their families and provides presentations, upon request, to military groups and organizations representing servicemembers and their families

<http://www.opuc.texas.gov>

### *State Bar of Texas*

The State Bar of Texas administers the Texas Lawyers for Texas Veterans program to develop and assist pro bono legal clinics throughout the state for military Veterans who otherwise cannot afford or do not have access to the legal services they need.

<http://www.texasbar.com>

### *Texas Commission on Jail Standards*

The Texas Commission on Jail Standards is the regulatory agency over Texas county jails. While the agency does not provide direct services to Veterans, the agency actively engages with sheriffs, county officials, and jail administrators about available resources for justice-involved Veterans.

Our activities include disseminating technical assistance memos to counties about Veterans' services found at the local, state, and federal level, writing articles on Veterans' resources in our agency newsletter, and inviting Veterans groups to speak during our agency presentations at training conferences.

As part of its regulatory requirements, the Commission mandates county jails utilize the Department of Veteran Affairs' Veteran Reentry Search Service (VRSS) to identify veterans. The VRSS provides real-time identification of veterans to county corrections officers. After justice-involved Veterans are identified, our goal is that counties can link Veterans to available services and resources.

<http://www.tcjs.state.tx.us>

#### *Texas Commission on Law Enforcement*

The Texas Commission on Law Enforcement has been committed for several years now to assist and expedite the ability of Veterans to re-enter the Texas workplace in the field of law enforcement. We have had in place since 2009 a process through which Veterans with military law enforcement experience can become Texas peace officers without having to participate in redundant training.

<http://www.tcole.texas.gov/>

#### *Texas Department of Criminal Justice*

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) manages offenders in state prisons, state jails and private correctional facilities that contract with TDCJ. TDCJ honors and supports Veterans by granting them employment preferences, and fully recognizes, honors, and enforces the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, a law which protects the civilian job rights and benefits of United States military service personnel.

TDCJ has a history of successful recruiting at military bases and continues to actively recruit personnel who are about to be honorably discharged. Military Veterans and staff have a great number of skills and quality training, along with experience handling a variety of responsibilities.

<http://www.tdcj.state.tx.us>

#### *Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs*

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) is the state agency responsible for promoting and preserving affordable home ownership, financing the development of affordable rental housing, ensuring long-term stability and habitability of housing for low-income households, [supporting community and](#) energy assistance programs, and providing housing activities in the colonies. TDHCA is also responsible for the regulation of the state's manufactured housing industry.

<http://www.tdhca.state.tx.us>

#### *Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation*

The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) is committed to providing expedited services to Veterans and military spouses and is proud to be a member of the Texas Coordinating Council for Veterans Services.

<http://www.tdlr.texas.gov>

- TDLR provides expedited licensing for military spouses and veterans transitioning to civilian occupations regulated by TDLR.

- Veterans are allowed to credit verified military experience, training, or education toward fulfilling licensing requirements. Currently, six TDLR programs have a corresponding MOS allowing for this credit.
- TDLR license application fees are waived for veterans if the applicant's military service, training, or education substantially meets all of the requirements of the license.

#### *Texas Department of Motor Vehicles*

The Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (TxDMV) offers a number of license plates specifically for military Veterans and military medal honorees at no fee and/or reduced fee. There are three categories of military license plates: Meritorious Service, Recognition Award, and Military Service.

Meritorious Service category license plates are issued at no fee (plate or registration) for the first set. Recognition Award category license plates require the payment of a \$3 plate fee; however, there is no requirement for the payment of annual registration fees. Military Service category license plates require the payment of the annual registration fee; however, there no plate fee. This applies to first and additional sets.

<http://www.txdmv.gov>

#### *Texas Department of Public Safety*

The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) proactively protects the citizens of Texas in an ever- changing threat environment while always remaining faithful to the U.S. and State Constitution.

DPS offers a designation of "VETERAN" on driver's licenses issued to Texas Veterans so they can easily prove their eligibility when applying for various benefits in addition to free and discounted licenses.

<http://www.txdps.state.tx.us>

#### *Texas Department of Transportation*

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is organized into 25 geographic districts that, together, cover the entire state and divisions that provide statewide support. TxDOT's workforce is made up of engineers, project managers, construction inspectors, maintenance workers, contract managers, accountants, purchasers, travel counselors, and many other professionals. All employees work together to accomplish the TxDOT mission: Connecting you with Texas. TxDOT provides funding and assistance for transportation services and programs that serve and support veterans.

<http://www.txdot.gov>

### *Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board*

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board provides leadership and coordination for the Texas higher education system. Since being created by the Texas Legislature in 1965, the Board has worked to achieve excellence for the college education of Texas students. The Board meets four times a year.

Meetings occur in Austin but are usually also broadcast on the web. <http://www.theccb.state.tx.us/>

### *Texas Military Department*

The Texas Military Department (TMD) is the executive portion of the Texas Military and consists of all staff directorates and component headquarters exercising control of military forces, facilities, installations, activities and functions under the supervision of The Adjutant General. The Adjutant General is the governing officer, policy maker, head of the department and Commander of the Texas Military Forces.

TMD is the state agency charged with administrative activities in support of the Texas Military Forces.

The Texas Military Forces consist of the Texas Army National Guard, Texas Air National Guard, the Texas State Guard, the Domestic Operations Task Force, and any other military force organized under state law.

Through the Family Support Services Office, the TMD has a number of programs and partnerships with services available to Texas Service Members, Veterans, and families such as: Family Assistance, Transition Assistance, Mental Health & Counseling Services, Employment and Financial Assistance, Retirement Services, and TRICARE Services.

[tmd.texas.gov/](http://tmd.texas.gov/)

### *Texas Workforce Commission*

TWC oversees a service delivery system comprising 28 Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) that administer services in more than 186 Texas Workforce Solutions Offices across the state. TWC provides employment assistance and education and training to individuals who are seeking employment. TWC collaborates with community and technical colleges and trains providers across the state to train veterans and other eligible individuals in target and in-demand occupations. Although services are available to the public, TWC has specific statutory direction to provide priority of service to veterans. This priority of service requirement is established in both federal and state law. TWC has a long tradition of supporting Texas Veterans because we believe Veterans are equipped with the technical skills, education, professionalism, and leadership experience sought by Texas employers.

The Texas Workforce Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation Division is engaged in a memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs- Veterans Rehabilitation and Employment (VA-VRE) to expand employment and rehabilitation services to Veterans with disabilities statewide and beyond the reach of VA-VRE. TWC – VR counselors work directly with the veterans to address potential barriers that prevent successful employment

due to their disability in each of our 6 regions. In collaboration with our local business services units, TWC's VR cultivates business partnerships with major employers to create employment opportunities for Veterans with disabilities.

TWC Veteran programs Include:

2. Texas Veterans Leadership Program
3. College Credit for Heroes
4. Hiring Red, White, and You Statewide Veteran Job Fair
5. Veterans Workforce Outreach Initiative
6. Apprenticeship Programs
7. Texas Operation Welcome Home
8. Skills for Transition Program
9. We Hire Vets
10. Military Family Support Program
11. Texas Veterans Network
12. Work Opportunity Tax Credits

#### [Texas Workforce Investment Council](#)

The Texas Workforce Investment Council assists the Governor and the legislature with strategic planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system, which is comprised of eight state agencies, their local program providers, and over 20 diverse and dynamic programs. The Council assists with the coordination of determining employer workforce needs and satisfaction with programs and services.

The Council's partner agencies, including TVC, gather data from employer customers at appropriate intervals to determine employer needs and satisfaction.

TVC's efforts to determine and respond to employer needs, thereby enhancing employment opportunities for Veterans, was initiated under the previous system strategic plan and continues under the recently approved *Texas Workforce System Strategic Plan FY 2016–FY 2023*. TVC's work to gather information and data by surveying employer continues, and results demonstrate a high response rate and a very high satisfaction level among employers who used the agency's employment services.

<http://governor.state.tx.us/twic>

#### [Texas Veterans Land Board](#)

Since 1946, the Texas Veterans Land Board (VLB) has provided benefits and services for Texas Veterans, military members and their families. Today, they include: low interest land, home, and home improvement loans; long term skilled nursing home care in eight state Veterans homes; burial and interment services in four state Veterans cemeteries; Voices of Veterans Oral History Program; and Veterans benefit information and assistance services through the joint VLB/ TVC, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Statewide Veterans Call Service Center.

[www.glo.texas.gov/vlb](http://www.glo.texas.gov/vlb)

### Texas Veterans Commission

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) provides claims representation and counseling for Veterans, their dependents and survivors, employment services to Texas Veterans and helps employers find qualified Veteran job applicants, assists Veterans in utilizing their higher education benefits, and offers grants to eligible charitable organizations, local government agencies, and Veterans Service Organizations that provide direct services to Texas Veterans and their families.

[www.tvc.texas.gov](http://www.tvc.texas.gov)

### Texas Online: Texas Veterans Portal

The Texas Veterans Portal provides information from federal and state agencies in a comprehensive collection of links about Veteran's benefit information. The website contains information to assist you and your family in buying a home or land, receiving education benefits, finding a job, health care resources and more.

[veterans.portal.texas.gov](http://veterans.portal.texas.gov)

### Veteran Treatment Court Programs in Texas

<b>County</b>	<b>Judicial Circuit</b>	<b>State, City Zip</b>
Bell	County Court at Law #3	Belton, Texas 76513
Bexar	437 <sup>th</sup> District Court	San Antonio, Texas 78205
Bexar	County Court #6	San Antonio, Texas 78205
Brazoria	149 <sup>th</sup> District Court	Angleton, TX 77515
Cameron	444 <sup>th</sup> District Court of Cameron County	Brownsville, Texas 78521
Collin	296 <sup>th</sup> District Court	McKinney, Texas 75071
Comal	County Court at Law #2	New Braunfels, Texas 78130
Dallas	Criminal District Court #4(K)	Dallas, Texas 75207
Denton	Denton County Criminal Court #3	Denton, Texas 76209
El Paso	County Court at Law #1	El Paso, Texas 79901
El Paso	346 <sup>th</sup> Judicial District	El Paso, Texas 79901



Fannin	296th District Court	Bonham, Texas 75418
Ft. Bend	County Court at Law #2	Richmond, Texas 77469
Galveston	Galveston County	Galveston, Texas 77550
Grayson	296th District Court	Sherman, Texas 75090
Guadalupe	County Court at Law	Seguin, Texas 78155
Harris	228th District Court	Houston, Texas 77002
Harris	County Criminal Court at Law No. 2	Houston, Texas 77002
Hays	County Court at Law #2	San Marcos, Texas 78666
Hidalgo	430th District Court	Edinburg, Texas 78539
Jefferson	58 <sup>th</sup> District Court	Beaumont, Texas 77701
Kaufman	296th District Court	Kaufman, Texas 75142
Midland	County Court #2	Midland, TX 79701
Montgomery	359th District Court	Conroe, Texas 77301
Nueces	148th District Court	Corpus Christi, Texas 78401
Rockwall	296th District Court	Rockwall, Texas 75087
Smith	County Court at Law #2	Tyler, Texas 75702
Starr	229th and 381 <sup>st</sup> District Court	Rio Grande City, Texas 78582
<b>County</b>	<b>Judicial Circuit</b>	<b>State, City Zip</b>
Tarrant	Tarrant County Criminal Court #9	Fort Worth, Texas 76196
Travis	County Court at Law #4	Austin, Texas 78701
Webb	406 <sup>th</sup> and 341 <sup>st</sup> District Court	Laredo, Texas 78040
Williamson	County Court at Law #2	Georgetown, Texas 78626
Zapata	49 <sup>th</sup> District Court	Zapata, TX 78076
Starr Webb Zapata	South Texas Regional Veterans Court	Varying Locations
Fannin Collin Grayson Rockwall Kaufman	North Texas Regional Veterans Court	Varying Locations