

**MINUTES
of the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**September 9, 2019
Clovis Civic Center
801 Schepps Boulevard
Clovis**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, co-chair, on September 9, 2019 at 9:37 a.m. at the Clovis Civic Center in Clovis.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Co-Chair
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez
Sen. Michael Padilla

Absent

Sen. Bill Tallman, Co-Chair
Rep. Rachel A. Black
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Advisory Members

Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Jane E. Powdrell-Culbert

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. Joy Garratt
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Sen. William H. Payne
Rep. G. Andrés Romero

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Staff, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file.

Monday, September 9

Introductions

Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

Disabled Veteran License Plate Transfers

Rick Madera, veteran, United States Air Force, and chapter commander, Disabled American Veterans Post 6, gave a presentation on the struggle that spouses of disabled veterans face over the transfer of disabled veteran license plates when a disabled veteran dies. He said that when a veteran passes away, the veteran's spouse is required to surrender the license plate and then must file and pay for a new vehicle registration. He said that the Purple Heart license plate is the only license plate that can be kept, but he believes that the law should be the same for other veteran license plates.

The committee discussed the following:

- the need to review statutes that govern how veteran license plates are handled;
- the potential transfer of existing statutory language to other statutes to create a better process for spouses;
- in the case of a spouse being unable to claim the veteran license plate, who would be the next member of the family to receive the veteran license plate; and
- whether an executive order could be issued by the governor to ease the process.

Building Healthy Military Communities (BHMC) Update

Valentina Livingston, New Mexico state coordinator, BHMC, gave a presentation on a pilot program that was created in 2016 to better understand the challenges faced by geographically dispersed service members and their families. She said that the framework for the BHMC program was issued by the United States Department of Defense (DOD) in an effort to build and maintain health, readiness and resiliency within programs that already exist. Each state in the BHMC program has a coordinator who serves as a focal point for well-being resources, she said. A study is being conducted to identify gaps in services that need to be addressed, she said, adding that some of the areas in New Mexico that existing data suggests need improvement or attention include mental health, substance misuse and physical fitness. She said that her mission is to facilitate community and service provider support for addressing these challenges.

Questions and comments from the committee included the following:

- funding is provided by the DOD through Operation Live Well;
- Operation Live Well's Open Data Analysis Dashboard displays how many service members reside in each county;
- the BHMC program has been focusing on seven counties in New Mexico;
- workshops, such as physical and nutritional workshops, that are provided to service members are also open to the public;
- marketing has been difficult due to a communication gap between the public and the organization;
- a newsletter is providing outreach and communication between pueblos and BHMC program staff to inform the public about the resources available; and

- the BHMC program is designed for all military members, but there is a focus on the National Guard and the reserve component because those members do not live on an active military base and do not have access to the resources that an active military member would have.

Military Spouse Professional License Reciprocity

James Burns, president, Burns Do It Center, and member, Committee of 50, introduced Shannon LeBlanc, school counselor and military spouse, and gave a summary of a bill regarding professional license reciprocity that he would like the committee to consider endorsing. Mr. Burns said that the military has a \$9.5 billion annual impact on the state economy, second only to the oil and gas industry. He said that the intent of the bill is to provide reciprocity of professional licensure and subsidization of fees for military service members, their spouses and their dependent children. He said that, for example, Clovis has a problem providing medical services. Mr. Burns added that part of his work involves attending meetings in Washington, D.C., with the Association of Defense Communities.

Committee members discussed the following:

- Senate Bill 97 (2018), Military Spouse Teacher Licensure, and House Bill 180 (2013), Military and Spouse Professional Licensure, were both passed and signed by the governor, and a committee member suggested reviewing what is currently in statute before crafting new legislation;
- reciprocity of teacher licensure exists for every state, as long as the license is in good standing, but it is taking six to eight months for licenses to be processed in New Mexico;
- allowing Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine personnel to practice in federal facilities in New Mexico;
- concern over military families not enrolling their children in New Mexico schools because education in New Mexico is ranked low;
- Cannon Air Force Base (CAFB) is addressing education reciprocity; and
- CAFB has a spousal employment specialist in its readiness center to coordinate at the base to handle any licensure-related issues.

Ms. LeBlanc said that she has been a licensed school counselor for 11 years in Florida and that her husband is currently stationed at CAFB. She told the committee how difficult it has been for her to obtain a certificate to practice in New Mexico. She was informed that her Florida certificate is not valid and that she would have to retake a licensure examination in order to obtain certification to practice in New Mexico. She noted that her certification from Alabama was validated in Florida when she moved there.

Committee members discussed the following:

- the Public Education Department may not be aware of the expedited licensure provisions for military members and their spouses;
- if an active military member is only stationed in New Mexico for two years, the spouse may not want to go through the licensure process; and
- the presenters may wish to have the opportunity to present at a Legislative Education Study Committee meeting.

Approval of Minutes

On a motion duly made and seconded, the minutes of the July 22, 2019 meeting were approved.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD)

Matt Barela, southeast region supervisor and veteran service officer (VSO), said that the mission of the VSD is to provide the highest quality service to and advocacy for New Mexico's veterans and their families. The CAFB population is 4,643, including veterans and active military service members. He said that there are vacant positions at the VSD, but the VSD is struggling to find replacements. Program initiatives include software upgrades, Native American VSO training and statewide outreach initiatives. There are additional VSOs in the Las Cruces area due to a high number of veterans in that area. Mr. Barela referred to slide 9 of his handout and explained the breakdown of total office visits that occurred in fiscal year 2019. He also explained the state benefits processed by VSOs, as detailed on slide 10 of his presentation.

Questions and comments included the following:

- a committee member asked what is included in the "miscellaneous" category of federal benefits listed on slide 10 of Mr. Barela's handout, and Mr. Barela replied that these benefits include burials, educational benefits, upgrades to veterans' homes and matters related to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs;
- VSOs process state benefits, work with county assessor offices and help veterans with tax-related questions;
- the state is not reimbursed for services provided;
- VSO training is conducted annually for recertification;
- a mid-level salary is an incentive to retain VSOs; however, vacant positions remain a concern; and
- VSOs are spread thin throughout the state, and they have to serve several counties.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m.

Tour and Update — CAFB

Colonel Robert Masaitis, commander, 27th Special Operations Wing, gave a presentation to committee members and staff and conducted a tour of CAFB.