

California VFW Legislative Report–5-3-09
William Manes, State Legislative/PAC Chairman

The following is a summary of committee actions during the week of April 27:

Passed by the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs:

AB 702 Veterans Housing and Assistance Program. (Mary Salas, Chula Vista)

Would establish the Veterans Housing and Assistance Program, under which the Department of Housing and Community Development would be authorized to make grants from the Veterans Housing and Assistance Fund, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to local governments and nonprofit organization to provide emergency or temporary housing for homeless veterans.

The bill is presented in the expectation that the Legislature will appropriate \$4 million to fund the program.

The bill had previously been approved by the Committee on Housing and Community Development, and now goes to the Appropriations Committee where it will undoubtedly be placed on the suspense file.

AB 716 Veteran services: state agencies and departments. (Alyson Huber, Lodi)

Would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a veteran data exchange system and enter into memorandums of understanding or interagency agreements with other state agencies and departments to ascertain the veteran status of all persons receiving services, benefits, or assistance from those state agencies and departments.

The purpose of establishing this system would be to have the California Department of Veterans Affairs and other state agencies and departments, as well as local government agencies, that come into regular contact with veterans and returning National Guard members do a better job of informing resident veterans and their dependents of their eligibility for federal benefits so that veterans and their dependents can enroll and begin the application process sooner.

AB 1570 Veterans: service providers. (Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs, Mary Salas, Chula Vista, Chair; Ted Lieu, Torrance; V. Manuel Perez, Cathedral City; Lori Saldana, San Diego; and Mariko Yamada, Vacaville.)

Would provide very detailed list of standards that would have to be met by any entity (organization, business, etc.) which wanted to enter into a contract with any department of the state government to provide social services to veterans.

Note: The actual purpose, and need, for this bill is very questionable.

Failed passage by the Assembly Committee on Veterans Affairs:

AB 776 Veterans. (Mary Salas, Chula Vista)

Existing federal law requires the proceeds from tax-exempt bonds, which fund the CAL-VET Farm and Home Loan Program, to be used for the acquisition of a single-family residence. This bill would require the department to urge the Congress of the United States to act immediately to remove this requirement from federal law, as specified, so that the proceeds from the bonds can be used for other types of housing.

The bill was officially opposed by VFW, Department of California, on the basis that this would subvert the purposes of the Cal-Vet Program. VFW had worked at the federal and state level so this program could be extended to combat veterans who served after the Vietnam War. The Veterans Bond Act of 2008 was passed by the voters in November with the stated purpose of providing funding for home loans to veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan during recent years. Assemblymember Paul Cook took the lead on the Committee in opposing the bill and was joined by 4 of the other Members.

Passed by the Assembly Committee on Health:

AB 710 Veterans' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Fund. (Mariko Yamada, Vacaville)
Would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit a grant application to the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) for the purposes of funding community-based organizations, certified by the department, to provide substance abuse and mental health services to veterans.

Passed by Assembly Committee on Housing and Community Development:

AB 1330 Veterans: pilot project: cooperative housing. (Mary Salas, Chula Vista)

This bill would authorize the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish a pilot project for the purpose of operating a cooperative housing project.

The Department would be required to use funds from the Cal-Vet Farm and Home Loan Program. There may be a question whether this is a legal use of the bond funds.

AB 1459 Multifamily Housing Program: veterans. (Mike Davis, Los Angeles)

This bill would provide that a sponsor of a supportive housing development may restrict occupancy to persons with veteran status if, in addition to meeting other requirements, the development is located on property that is owned or leased by a city, county, or city and county.

Passed by Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing:

SB 595 Homeless Veterans Housing and Supportive Services Act of 2010. (Gil Cedillo, Los Angeles)

Would enact the Homeless Veterans Housing and Supportive Services Act of 2010, which would authorize the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$1.5 million to be used to finance supportive housing projects for homeless veterans, or veterans at risk of homelessness. If the bill is passed by the Legislature, the proposed bond act would be placed on the ballot for the November 2, 2010 General Election.

Passed by Senate Committee on Education:

SB 611 Student Financial aid: Cal Grant A Entitlement Awards: veterans. (Lou Correa, Santa Ana)

Existing law requires that students who receive the CalGrant education awards use the funds only for tuition or student fees, or both.

This bill would authorize a student whose tuition or fees, or both, are paid in full by the Post 9/11 GI Bill to use the CalGrant award funds for living expenses and expenses for transportation, supplies and books.

SB 646 Student financial aid: veterans and dependents. (Jeff Denham, Merced).

Enacts the Golden State GI Bill of Rights for Higher Education, would require that the University of California, California State University, and the California Community Colleges not charge tuition or fees to those students who qualified for the Post 9/11 GI Bill but have no remaining entitlement for funds.

SB 815 Student financial aid programs: military services. (Dave Cogdill, Fresno)

Would establish the California National Guard Education Assistance Award Program on behalf of qualifying members of the California National Guard, the State Military Reserve, and the Naval Militia. Supported by VFW, Department of California, and the Office of the Governor.

Held by Senate Committee on Education:

SB 647 California National Guard Education Assistance Award Program. (Jeff Denham, Merced)

Would state the intent of the Legislature that, in order to fulfill the public program of maintaining required strength in the California National Guard, an inducement be provided to members of the California National Guard by making educational assistance awards available to California National Guard members seeking to improve themselves through higher education. These assistance awards were

to be available to California National Guard members who serve the state faithfully commencing with the 2010–11 academic year.

Note: But see SB 815, above.

Passed by Senate Committee on Public Employment and Retirement:

SB 644 Civil Service Examinations: veterans' preference. (Jeff Denham, Merced)

Existing law provides that disabled veterans who become eligible for certification from eligible lists by attaining the passing mark established for an entrance examination held on an open, nonpromotional basis are allowed 10 additional points. Other veterans are allowed 5 additional points. This bill, as now amended, would instead provide that disabled veterans shall be allowed 15 additional points and other veterans shall be allowed 10 additional points.

Additional note:

The VFW Legislative Day at the Capitol was a successful affair. Senator Mark Wyland and Assemblymember Paul Cook were presented the awards as Legislator of the Year 2009 for their active support of veterans issues. For the fourth year in a row, Governor Schwarzenegger took time from his schedule to make a personal visit to the event.

Complete information on all state legislation involving veterans issues is available at the website:

<http://www.califveterans.com>