

**Governor's Committee to Support the Military  
Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

## GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE TO SUPPORT THE MILITARY

### 2022 REPORT

#### Background

On September 5, 2018, Governor Abbott issued an Executive Order establishing the Governor's Committee to Support the Military (Committee) because Texas is intricately linked to the U.S. military forces. With 15 military installations, over \$114.2 billion in economic output and almost \$42.3 billion in disposable personal income, the U.S. military is one of Texas' largest industries. Additionally, many Texans serve in the military both at home and abroad, plus a significant number of veterans choose to call Texas home. A 2020 study by the Council on Foreign Relations showed Texas had the second-largest number of enlisted recruits. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs showed over 1.6 million veterans resided in Texas as of September 2015, which is the second largest population of veterans in the United States. As such, it is important the state collaborates with the U.S. military to ensure the mutually beneficial partnership continues.

On January 24, 2023 the Committee issued its report with findings and eight recommendations across three categories of Education, Healthcare, and Quality of Life; Workforce Development; and Encroachment and Infrastructure.

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

- SB 1200 allows a military spouse to practice in the state if they hold a license that is substantially equivalent in another state.
- HB 1597 established residency for purposes of enrolling in an open enrollment charter school for children of military members upon the military member receiving a transfer order to an installation in the school's attendance zone.
- HB 1 expanded the appropriation for the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) program from \$40 to \$50 million for the biennium.
- HB 2530 created an online repository of information of use to active-duty military families relocating to Texas.
- HB 3399 allows TXDOT to perform federally funded road maintenance work on military installations.
- HB 3932 modified state code to allow the Texas Education Agency to establish a State Advisory Council on Educational Opportunity for Military Children to in support of the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3).

Another recommendation was enacted through policy actions:

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

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

Even with the progress made, Texas must remain cognizant of the constantly evolving defense, economic, political, and technological environments that may put pressure on or create risk for our installations and the Texas defense industry. Ongoing DoD and service modernization efforts will create opportunities to attract new military missions, capabilities, and units to Texas. These efforts will also create risk of losing current military missions, capabilities, and units due to operational obsolescence or elimination. Through its proactive approach, Texas will turn risk into opportunity. This report serves as an update to the previous reports and makes the following observations and recommendations.

### **Committee Findings and Recommendations**

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

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

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

**Background:** In 2009 Texas enacted a 100% property tax exemption for Disabled Veterans with a 100% disability rating in recognition as tangible recognition of and a benefit for recognizing the service and sacrifice of disabled veterans. This discussion does not seek to change that benefit. This discussion only seeks to address how communities are reimbursed for loss of tax revenue to offset the unintended, negative consequences on the quality of life for significantly impacted local communities. Over time, this mandate has created significant losses in city and county tax revenue due to the substantial increase in disabled veteran tax exemptions with many of these municipalities near military installations.

Under current law, municipalities that physically border a military installation may receive partial reimbursement from the state for the loss of tax revenue. However, municipalities only receive partial reimbursement for the revenue losses with reimbursement rates historically less than one-third to one-quarter of lost tax revenue. Municipalities with high disabled veteran populations but without a physical border to a military installation are not eligible for any reimbursement for the tax revenue loss.

In both situations, the loss of tax revenue has a negative impact on the quality of life surrounding those installations. Local jurisdictions only recourse is to either increase taxes and impose fees or reduce services. For example, Cibolo, Harker Heights, Killeen, and others have lost significant amounts of revenue due to do this exemption. The impact is annual with a growing cumulative effect on the affected municipalities. The loss of revenue negatively affects local services and infrastructure impacting quality of life in these

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

jurisdictions. Recent Department of Defense stationing decisions include evaluation criteria for quality of life.

Past Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions eliminated weaker installations with the surviving installations scoring well on traditional military value and training criteria. The result is that historically lesser valued criteria will have greater impacts on future installation scores. As we look forward, any future stationing decisions for new missions or capabilities and/or future Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) actions, Quality of Life and similar criteria will weigh higher in those decisions which makes these important metrics that should be maintained and not ignored. The disabled veterans' tax exemption impact on local services and infrastructure potentially negatively affects the installation scores for new mission and capability stationing decisions as well as future BRAC actions.

**Findings:** We recognize the disabled veterans' tax exemption is a tangible recognition and a benefit for the service and sacrifice of disabled veterans. This discussion does not seek to change that benefit. This discussion only seeks to address how communities are reimbursed for loss of tax revenue to offset the unintended, negative consequences on the quality of life for significantly impacted local communities. Mitigation of the negative impacts achieves two objectives. First mitigation continues to ensure military installations and the surrounding communities score well and remain competitive in future stationing decisions or BRAC actions. Second mitigation ensures all citizens share the cost equally while ensuring municipalities are compensated equitably which allows them to provide the services and quality of life their citizens deserve.

This issue becomes more significant due to the ongoing modernization efforts across all military services. These modernization efforts produce new operational doctrine, new equipment, new military capabilities, and units that may need to be created or restationed. Traditionally, the services use stationing criteria similar to BRAC criteria for these stationing decisions. We must ensure that Texas' military installations are competitive during the stationing decisions for all criteria including Quality of Life.

Efforts to highlight, educate, and discuss the topic in search of a solution should continue. We must work to mitigate the resource impact to communities around military installations to prevent negative effects to Quality of Life, which is a DoD evaluation criterion for stationing decisions for missions and units. DoD stationing decisions are highly competitive processes. Installations and their communities must put their best face forward to successfully compete, which requires resources. The impacts affect not only the municipalities but also impact the veterans and active-duty servicemembers residing in the community. The potential negative resource impact on community Quality of Life may disadvantage communities during these competitions.

**Recommendation:** The Legislature should explore options to mitigate the negative resource impact on communities and take action to ensure Texas military installations and the surrounding communities remain competitive for future mission and stationing decisions as well as future BRAC actions. This cost of the disabled veteran tax exemption should be distributed equitably with each Texan and Texas community bearing a fair share of the benefit's cost. The state should provide equitable reimbursement to communities significantly affected by this state benefit which allows those communities to provide the quality of life and resources to both veterans and active-duty servicemember in the community.

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

### 2. Early Enrollment for Military Family Students

**Background:** In 2019, Texas passed HB1597 allowing military family students with orders assigning them to Texas to enroll in school before actual arrival allowing military family students to participate in high demand programs and classes. The legislation currently states *“shall provide to the school district proof of residence in the district’s attendance zone not later than the 10<sup>th</sup> day after the arrival date specified in the order.”*

**Finding:** The extremely competitive housing market has changed housing availability in communities across Texas which creates significant challenges for incoming military families. Historically, 70%-75% of military families live off the military installation in local communities. Many military families are experiencing long lead times to find housing frequently taking up to 90 days to find housing. This creates a challenge for military family students to remain in the same school.

**Recommendation:** Modify the current Texas code to change “10 days” to “90 days” to provide school districts proof of residence. This accounts for the long lead time to find housing and allows military family students to remain stable in school.

### 3. Military Child Education Coalition

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

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

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

### 4. Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)

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

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

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

to incomplete data. This creates a burden on districts and also weakens the importance of the military readiness indicator for districts.

Data from the DMDC will provide Texas with accurate data that can be incorporated into the TEA accountability system, award data based scores for Military Readiness, and will encourage the continued emphasis on military enlistment after graduation.

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

On 13 July 2022, TEA received and reviewed a draft memorandum of agreement from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC). TEA returned the draft memorandum of agreement to DMDC on 1 August 2022. As of 8 November 2022, the draft memorandum of agreement is with the DMDC Cybersecurity Team for review.

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

### Workforce Development

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

**Background:** Military installations (bases, depots, training facilities) and military related industries (manufacturing, maintenance, operations support) in Texas frequently struggle to maintain civilian workforces with required skills in advanced manufacturing and technology. Additionally, as members of the military transition to civilian life, finding ways to integrate their military experience into the private sector is can be challenging and rewarding for both veterans and Texas based military industries.

**Finding:** Texas has a shortage of individuals with the knowledge and experience to work in advanced manufacturing and technology-based industries that support the military. Military related industry and DoD Installations employ thousands of Texas civilians in well-paying jobs. Annual salaries and benefits often exceed \$100K/year, but in many cases these jobs remain unfilled, due to a shortage of candidates with the required skills.

**Recommendation:** Develop legislation to encourage Texas high schools, technical and community colleges, and universities to invest in programs which support the growing demands in Texas for advanced manufacturing and technology skills. Increase awareness of this state-wide skill deficit by improving communication between our military installations, Texas based military industry, and educational institutions.

Recommend TEA to consider the needs of Texas military bases and military industry in their discussions on programs of study for the purpose of Federal Perkins Alignment. Require the

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

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

### Encroachment and Infrastructure

#### 6. Addition of Airfield Paving to Interagency Contracts between TXDOT and the Military

**Background:** The Texas Legislature passed HB3399 in the 2021 session allowing TXDOT to perform road work on federal military installations if the installation pays for the work.

**Findings:** HB3399 specifies "road maintenance, improvement, relocation, or extension services for military installations." The bill did not include all services or capabilities available from TXDOT such as airfield paving services or other services which TXDOT can perform.

**Recommendation:** Modify Texas Code to allow TXDOT to perform any TXDOT service on military installations including airfield pavement projects to include runways, taxiways, and aircraft parking areas or related TXDOT services if the installation pays for the work.

#### 7. Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG) Program

**Background:** The DEAAG program is an invaluable resource to Texas' military installations and communities. It provides cost share funding to improve the military value of military installations while setting the conditions to prepare for future BRAC actions. It also has a significant return on investment for the state. Over the last four biennia, \$98.4 million was appropriated to the Texas Military Preparedness Commission for the purposes of providing DEAAG grants. Those funds were awarded to a total of thirty-seven (37) projects benefitting fifteen (15) installations surrounding communities with a combined return on investment of \$343.4M to the state.

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

**Recommendation:** Fully fund the DEAAG program to \$30M to help enhance military installations in Texas while improving and protecting those installations and surrounding communities from potential negative impacts of a future BRAC or stationing decision. The DEAAG program's 349% Return on Investment (ROI) demonstrates its efficacy and contributions to the communities, the installations, and the state.

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

### **8. Encroachment on Military Training**

**Background:** Military training capabilities remain particularly susceptible to encroachment from off-base infrastructure developments which may negatively impact training including aviation, ground maneuver, and electromagnetic spectrum capabilities. To illustrate this point, military aviation training capabilities are particularly susceptible to encroachment from wind energy developments. Military aviation training requires the ability to conduct low-level flights down to 200 feet above ground level flight training during periods of limited visibility with night vision systems. The next generation of military aircraft in development will require at least the same capability for training at low-level at speeds that are 2-3 times faster than current aircraft. The negative impacts to military training areas and aviation routes are a concern because units unable to train as they fight will impact our national security.

Military installations in Texas are not just a benefit to the state; they also help secure the nation. The previous round of BRAC heavily weighted training capability as part of an installation evaluation, and future BRAC evaluations will continue to emphasize training capabilities. The last encroachment protection enacted was by the 85th Texas Legislature with Senate Bill 277 which prohibited Chapter 313 tax subsidies and abatements for wind energy projects within 25 nautical miles of the boundaries of fixed-wing military aviation facilities. However, with the program's expiration, Texas must ensure that any future legislation must include protections against encroachment around military installations.

The state must also maintain awareness against efforts or projects undertaken by proxies on behalf of foreign national governments to acquire land and facilities or develop projects adjacent to military installations that could be used to impact the operations or used for intelligence collection against military installations. Although these efforts may appear benign on the surface, careful scrutiny and consideration of potential impacts to military installations must be considered. Recent examples include a Chinese-backed wind energy project around a south Texas USAF installation and efforts to acquire land near an USAF base in North Dakota.

**Finding:** Failure to protect installation and aviation training areas from encroachment creates a risk for retention of current military missions. If an aviation training area is deemed unusable due to encroachment, the military installation may also be deemed unusable by DoD and potentially require restationing of units. We must take a critical look at current encroachment provisions to ensure military training areas remain viable or risk potential loss of missions and associated units.

Additionally, attempts by foreign companies or governments to acquire land or facilities near military installations should be carefully considered and scrutinized for potential impacts to the military installation's mission and operations. Any threat to national security interests within the state of Texas must be identified and deterred.

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

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

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

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

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

### Section 397.005

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

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

### Section 2

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

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

## **Appendix**

### Efforts to Support the Military

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

#### Funding for Military Communities

In 1997, via Senate Bill 227, the Legislature created a grant program to provide local governments with grants and low-interest loans that could be used to fund the local match requirement of federal grants for certain development projects in defense-dependent communities. This program was originally administered by the Texas Department of Commerce. In 2003 the program was moved to the Office of the Governor and administered by the Texas Military Preparedness Commission. The grant program, now called the Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grant (DEAAG), has awarded over \$85 million to local communities and

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

leveraged over \$200 million since its inception. The original purpose of the grant program was to assist communities impacted by a federal round of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC). During the 83rd Texas Legislature, Senate Bill 1200 was passed amending the DEAAG statute to expand by allowing grant funds to be used prior to a round of BRAC to add military value. Since 2015, \$50 million in DEAAG funds have been awarded to communities for infrastructure projects to add military value to their local military installation. Every defense community in the state has received at least one DEAAG award. The most recent recipient, Austin Community College District, received \$2 million in support of the buildout of facilities required to support the new Army Futures Command.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Senate Bill 807 waived examination fees for service members or veterans who have military service, training, or education substantially similar to the requirements of the license. SB 807 also waived examination fees for service members, military veterans, and military spouses who

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

held a current license issued by another jurisdiction if the licensing requirements were substantially equivalent to Texas requirements. SB 1307 streamlined Chapter 55 of the Texas Occupations Code to ensure every military spouse, veteran, and active-duty service member would get credit for their skills and have their occupational licenses expedited.

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

### Other Ways Texas is Supporting Service Members and their Families

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

### Efforts to Support Veterans

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

### Jobs/Economic Opportunity

- **New Veteran Hiring Incentive:** Governor Abbott recently announced an additional incentive program for new Texas Enterprise Fund grantees designed to encourage the hiring of military veterans. New grantees, in addition to being eligible for funding on a per

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

- job created basis, are eligible for an additional \$1,000 per job filled by a veteran during the first year of job creation.
- **Texas Talent Connection Grants:** Governor Abbott recently awarded \$5.5 million in grants for education and workforce training programs in communities across the state designed to lead to successful job placement, increased wages, and improved job retention for workforce populations including veterans.
  - **Veteran's Preference & Military Service Credit:** Veterans have preference in employment with State agencies or offices, as do widows/widowers and children of those killed on active duty.
  - **WorkInTexas:** The state labor exchange/job matching system places a two-day hold on all new job postings to ensure veterans get first review.
  - **Texas Operation Welcome Home:** Governor Abbott requested the Texas Workforce Commission to work with Texas military installations to better meet the needs of transitioning service members and recently separated veterans. The program assists veterans in translating their military skills into civilian terms, finding employment, completing two- to four-year college programs, or obtaining the appropriate licensure or certifications to compete in the job market.
  - **Skills for Transition:** Designed for separating service members who plan to remain in Texas, this program provides skills training for employment in high-growth, high-demand occupations.
  - **Veterans Employment Services:** Assisting veterans in obtaining long-term meaningful employment through job matching and referrals, translating military skills to civilian jobs, resume assistance and interviewing techniques, employer outreach, and job development.
  - **Red, White, and You Veteran Job Fair:** Veteran job fairs are held across the state on the same day during the week of Veterans Day.
  - **We Hire Vets Campaign:** This campaign recognizes Texas employers whose workforce is comprised of 10% or more of veterans.
  - **Texas Veterans Leadership Program:** A resource and referral network for veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan who are transitioning back into civilian life.
  - **Veteran Entrepreneur Program:** The program assists veteran entrepreneurs in identifying funding sources, mentors, business opportunities and business education programs in a one-stop-shop.
  - **Contract Preferences:** All state agencies when purchasing goods give first preference to goods produced or offered by a service-disabled Texas veteran.
  - **Work Opportunity Tax Credits:** A tax incentive is offered for employers hiring individuals from specific populations with historically higher rates of unemployment, including veterans.
  - **Troops to Teachers:** A federally funded program that assists military personnel and veterans with transitioning into a new career as public school teachers in "high-needs" school districts. There are 25 state TTT support offices to help with certification requirements.
  - **Women Veterans Program:** The mission of the program is to ensure that the women veterans in Texas have equitable access to federal and state veterans' benefits and services.
  - **Texas Veterans Land Board:** The board offers land loans, home loans, and home improvement loans to veterans and surviving spouses that meet the eligibility requirements.

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

### **Education**

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

### **Healthcare**

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

## Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022

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

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

### Quality of Life

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

### Other Support Services

- **Texas State Veterans Home Program:** Currently, the Texas State Veterans Home Program operates nursing homes in Houston, Bonham, Floresville, Big Spring, McAllen, El Paso, Temple, Tyler, and Amarillo. It offers affordable nursing home care for Texas veterans, their spouses, and Gold Star Parents. **Texas State Veterans Cemetery Program:** Through a partnership with the VA, the Veterans Land Board builds and operates Texas State Veterans Cemeteries. Currently, there are four cemeteries in operation with more in the planning stage. These State Veterans Cemeteries are located in Abilene, Corpus Christi, Killeen, and Mission. There is no charge for interment of veterans, spouses, and eligible dependents.

## **Governor's Committee to Support the Military Initiative / Issues Update - 2022**

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