SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR

SENATE, No. 1400

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

ADOPTED JUNE 25, 2020

Sponsored by:
Senator JOSEPH PENNACCHIO
District 26 (Essex, Morris and Passaic)
Senator VIN GOPAL
District 11 (Monmouth)

Co-Sponsored by:
Senators Brown and Cruz-Perez

SYNOPSIS

Establishes task force to study issues facing returning members of US Armed Forces, NJ National Guard, and reserve component of US Armed Forces; creates permanent commission to study various definitions related to veteran status.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Substitute as adopted by the Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 7/16/2020)

AN ACT establishing a task force on returning members of the United States Armed Forces and reserve components, and the New Jersey National Guard, and creating a permanent commission to study the definitions related to veteran status, and supplementing chapter 3 of Title 38A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. a. There is hereby established in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs a task force consisting of 13 members as follows:

(1) the Commissioner of Education or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(2) the Commissioner of Labor and Workforce Development or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(3) the Commissioner of Health or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(4) the Commissioner of Human Services, or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(5) the Chairperson of the Civil Service Commission, or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(6) the Adjutant General of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, or a designee, who shall serve ex officio;

(7) one member, appointed by the Adjutant General who shall be a member of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States, Department of New Jersey;

(8) a member of the Veterans' Services Council, as established by section 22 of P.L.1948, c.448 (C.13:1B-20), appointed by the chairperson of the council; and

(9) five public members appointed by the Adjutant General, at least three of whom shall have knowledge or experience in one of the following areas: demobilization and post deployment; post traumatic stress disorder; family readiness groups or family assistance centers; employer support groups; veterans service officers; issues relevant to women in the military; or veteran homeless shelters.

b. Any vacancy in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

c. Members of the task force shall be appointed within 30 days after the effective date of this act, and shall hold their initial organizational meeting as soon as practicable, but no later than 30 days following appointment of a majority of the authorized membership. At the initial organizational meeting, the members shall elect a chairperson from among the members of the task force by a majority vote of the members present. The chairperson may appoint a secretary, who need not be a member of the task force.

d. The public members of the task force, and the members of the task force appointed pursuant to paragraphs (7) and (8) of subsection

a. of this section, shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in the performance of their official duties within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the task force.

e. The task force shall meet at the call of the chairperson. The task force shall hold at least three public hearings in different parts of the State and elicit testimony from the public at such times and places as the chair shall designate. A meeting of the task force shall be called at the request of seven of the task force's members.

f. Seven members of the task force shall constitute a quorum. No action of the task force shall be taken without the affirmative vote of seven of the members, except for the election of the chairperson at the initial organizational meeting pursuant to subsection c. of this section.

g. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs shall provide such clerical and other administrative assistants, and such professional staff, as the task force requires to carry out its work.

2. a. The purpose of the task force shall be to (1) identify and review the issues and concerns facing members of the United States Armed Forces, New Jersey National Guard, and a reserve component of the United States Armed Forces returning from overseas deployments involving the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and (2) recommend the measures the State should take to address and remedy the issues and concerns, including legislation if appropriate.

b. The task force shall:

(1) examine current data, research, programs, and initiatives related to the physical, social, emotional, and mental impact of military service upon servicemembers and their families;

(2) identify effective strategies for promoting lifelong physical, social, emotional, and mental health of servicemembers and their families; and

(3) develop recommendations to implement those strategies, including legislation if appropriate.

c. The task force shall prepare and issue a final report on its findings, conclusions, and recommendations, including any recommendations for legislation that it deems appropriate, and shall submit the report to the Governor, and the Legislature in accordance with the requirements of section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1). The final report shall be issued no later than six months after the task force organizes.

3. a. There is hereby created, in but not of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, a permanent study commission consisting of five members as follows:

(1) one member, appointed by the Governor who shall be an employee of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs;

(2) two members, of whom one shall be appointed by the President of the Senate and one shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate; and

(3) two members, of whom one shall be appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly and one shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the General Assembly.

b. Any vacancy in the membership of the commission shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

c. Members of the commission shall be appointed within 30 days after the effective date of this act, and shall hold their initial organizational meeting as soon as practicable, but no later than 30 days following appointment of a majority of the authorized membership. At the initial organizational meeting, the members shall elect a chairperson and vice-chairperson from among the members of the study commission by a majority vote of the members present. The chairperson may appoint a secretary, who need not be a member of the commission.

d. Members of the study commission shall serve without compensation, but shall be eligible for reimbursement for necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in the performance of their official duties within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to the commission.

e. Three members of the study commission shall constitute a quorum. No action of the study commission shall be taken without the affirmative vote of three of the members, except for the election of the chairperson and vice-chairperson at the initial organizational meeting pursuant to subsection c. of this section.

f. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs shall provide such clerical and other administrative assistants, and such professional staff, as the task force requires to carry out its work.

4. a. The purpose of the study commission shall be to (1) review the various definitions of "veteran," "disabled veteran," "service-disabled veteran," and any other definition of veteran in the statutes, and (2) recommend changes to such definitions in the statutes that may provide greater uniformity and be less restrictive.

b. The study commission shall:

(1) compile and analyze the various definitions of "veteran," "disabled veteran," "service-disabled veteran," and any other definition of veteran in the statutes;

(2) identify statutes with unique and restrictive requirements for the various definitions and determine if the requirements may be revised to achieve more uniform definitions;

(3) identify potential revisions to be made to the statutes to provide for a clearer understanding of the requirements for qualification under the various definitions;

(4) consult with the military community for expertise and input concerning paragraphs (1) through (3) of this subsection; and

(5) use the findings of the study commission, and the expertise from the military community, to recommend changes to the various definitions and submit the findings and recommendations in the initial report and all subsequent reports, pursuant to subsection c. of this section.

c. The study commission shall prepare and issue an annual report on its findings, conclusions, and recommendations and shall submit the report to the Governor, the Legislature in accordance with the requirements of section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), the Senate Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee, or its successor, and the General Assembly Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee, or its successor. The first annual report shall be issued no later than 12 months after the commission organizes, and each subsequent annual report shall be issued no later than 12 months from the date of the last report.

5. This act shall take effect immediately and the task force shall expire 30 days after issuance of its final report.