

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 45 — Postsecondary Education Course Registration for Veterans

by K-20 Innovation Subcommittee; and Rep. Smith and others (SB 94 by Senators Fasano, Evers, and Sachs)

The bill requires public postsecondary institutions that offer priority course registration to a segment of the student population to provide priority course registration to veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces who are receiving GI Bill educational benefits. The bill also allows for a veteran's spouse or dependent children to whom the GI Bill educational benefits have been transferred to be granted priority course registration. Additionally, the bill encourages independent postsecondary institutions to provide the same benefit of priority course registration to veterans and their dependents as public postsecondary institutions are required to provide under the bill.

The bill will enable veterans who are utilizing GI Bill educational benefits to have greater access to available courses, thereby decreasing the number of excess hours taken by veterans and reducing the time to graduation.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 116-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 59 — Spaceport Territory

by Business and Consumer Affairs Subcommittee; and Rep. Ray and others (CS/SB 110 by Community Affairs Committee and Senators Wise and Gibson)

In July 2010, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) authorized use of Cecil Field Spaceport in Jacksonville for horizontal take-offs and landings of suborbital launch vehicles. In response to the FAA's authorization for Cecil Field Spaceport, the bill amends s. 331.304, F.S., to designate the property within the boundaries of Cecil Airport and Cecil Commerce Center in Jacksonville as a spaceport territory. The bill also permits the board of directors of Space Florida to designate future real property within the state as a spaceport territory if the property has been licensed by the FAA to operate as a spaceport.

The designation of Cecil Field Spaceport and other future spaceports as spaceport territories will allow for those spaceport territories to be included in Space Florida's master planning efforts, making them eligible for state funds for road or other infrastructure improvements. The provisions in the bill intend to aid Space Florida in attracting different types of commercial space companies and competing for spaceflight businesses.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 30-0; House 112-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HJR 93 — Homestead Property Tax Exemption for Surviving Spouse of Military Veteran or First Responder

by Finance and Tax Committee; and Rep. Harrison and others (CS/SJR 1056 by Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee; and Senators Norman and Sachs)

The joint resolution proposes an amendment to Art. VII, s. 6, State Constitution that would allow the Legislature to provide ad valorem tax relief to the surviving spouse of a veteran who died from service-connected causes while on active duty as a member of the U.S. Armed Forces and to the surviving spouse of a first responder who died in the line of duty. The amount of tax relief, to be defined by general law, may partially, or totally, exempt the ad valorem tax owed on homestead property.

Section 32 is added to Art. XII, State Constitution to provide that if approved by voters, the amendment permitting the Legislature to provide ad valorem relief to surviving spouses of veterans who died from service-connected causes and first responders who died in the line of duty shall take effect January 1, 2013.

If approved by 60 percent of persons voting in the November 2012 General Election, these provisions will take effect on January 1, 2013.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 115-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 95 — Homestead Property Tax Exemptions

by Finance and Tax Committee; and Rep. Harrison (CS/SB 1058 by Budget Subcommittee on Finance and Tax; Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee; and Senators Norman and Sachs)

The bill amends s. 196.081, F.S., to establish the “Fallen Heroes Family Relief Act” to provide a full exemption from ad valorem taxes to a surviving spouse of a first responder who died in the line of duty. The provisions in the bill amending s. 196.081, F.S., are contingent on the approval by the voters of the proposed amendment to the State Constitution contained in CS/HJR 93. The bill provides that the exemption may apply as long as the spouse holds the legal and beneficial title to the homestead, permanently resides thereon, and does not remarry.

The bill defines the term “first responder” to mean a law enforcement officer, a correctional officer, a firefighter, or an emergency medical technician or paramedic, who is a full-time paid employee, part-time paid employee, or unpaid volunteer. The bill defines “in the line of duty” to mean:

- While engaging in law enforcement;
- While performing an activity relating to fire suppression and prevention;
- While responding to a hazardous material emergency;
- While performing rescue activity;
- While providing emergency medical services;
- While performing disaster relief activity;
- While otherwise engaging in emergency response activity; or
- While engaging in a training exercise related to any of the events or activities enumerated in this paragraph if the training has been authorized by the employing entity.

Upon approval of the amendment proposed by CS/HJR 93 by the voters, the bill will operate prospectively to tax rolls submitted to the Department of Revenue by each county tax collector beginning January 2013 and each January thereafter. The provisions in the bill apply for surviving spouses of first responders whose deaths occur before, on, or after January 1, 2013.

The bill appropriates \$100,302 to the Department of State to publish the proposed constitutional amendment contained in CS/HJR 93 in newspapers in each county as required by Art. XI, s. 5(d), State Constitution.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect January 1, 2013, contingent upon approval by the electors of the proposed amendment to the State Constitution contained in CS/HJR 93 at the 2012 General Election. If approved by the Governor, the provisions in section 4 of the bill take effect January 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 118-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

SB 276 — Recognition of Military Personnel and Veterans

by Senators Sachs, Evers, Gaetz, Dean, and Bullard

Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame

The bill amends s. 265.003, F.S., to create the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council (Council) within the Florida Department of Veterans (FDVA). The Council is created to serve as an advisory body tasked with annually accepting nominations of persons to be considered for induction into the existing Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame. The Council is required to annually transmit a list of 20 nominees to the FDVA for submission to the Governor and Cabinet, who select the nominees to be inducted.

The Council consists of 7 honorably discharged veterans in which the Governor, the Attorney General, the Chief Financial Officer, the Commissioner of Agriculture, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the executive director of the FDVA each appoint one member to the Council. Members of the Council are prohibited from receiving compensation for their services, but are entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses incurred in the performance of their duties. However, the bill prohibits state funds from being used for travel reimbursement purposes.

Purple Heart Day

The bill designates August 7 of each year as "Purple Heart Day." It authorizes the Governor to annually issue a proclamation designating August 7 as Purple Heart Day and also encourages public officials, schools, private organizations, and all residents of the state to commemorate Purple Heart Day and to honor those wounded or killed while serving in any branch of the United States Armed Forces.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 117-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

HB 347 — College Credit for Military Training and Education Courses

by Rep. Harrell and others (SB 532 by Senators Altman, Gaetz, Sachs, and Evers)

The bill requires the Board of Governors to adopt regulations and the State Board of Education to adopt rules to provide guidance to their respective institutions in evaluating and awarding college credit for training and education acquired in the military. The procedures established in the rules and regulations will allow for a more uniform approach in evaluating and awarding college credit for military training and education across public higher education institutions in Florida.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 116-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 463 — Concealed Weapons or Firearms

by Agriculture and Natural Resources Subcommittee; and Reps. Kreegel, Brandes, and others (SB 998 by Senators Negron, Norman and Evers)

Concealed Weapon or Firearm Licenses for Military Servicemembers and Veterans

The bill provides an exception to the minimum age requirement (21 years of age) for obtaining a license to carry a concealed weapon for members of the United States Armed Forces and honorably discharged veterans. The bill allows Florida resident military servicemembers and honorably discharged veterans who are under the age of 21, and are otherwise qualified, to obtain a concealed weapon or firearm license. The bill also requires the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to accept background check fingerprints for military concealed weapon or firearm permit applicants which have been prepared by military law enforcement officials.

The bill also provides that a military servicemember or an honorably discharged veteran who is a nonresident of Florida and who holds a concealed weapon license from another state which honors Florida's concealed weapon license, is exempt from the age requirement (21 years of age) for carrying a concealed weapon or firearm in Florida.

Discharging a Firearm on Residential Property

The bill amends s. 790.15, F.S., to provide that a person who recklessly or negligently discharges a firearm outdoors on any property used or zoned exclusively for residential use commits a misdemeanor of the first degree.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 116-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

SB 634 — Spaceport Facilities

by Senators Benacquisto, Gaetz, Ring, Gibson, Flores, Fasano, Storms, Norman, Detert, Hays, Siplin, Altman, Bennett, Thrasher, Latvala, and Bogdanoff

The bill (Chapter 2012-1, L.O.F.) amends s. 331.303, F.S., by defining the term “launch support facilities” and deleting the term “spaceport launch facilities.” “Launch support facilities,” as defined by the bill, means facilities located at launch sites or launch ranges that are required to support launch activities, including launch vehicle assembly, launch vehicle operations and control, communications, and flight safety functions, as well as payload operations, control, and processing. This change is intended to provide an updated definition of spaceport infrastructure for state and federal purposes.

These provisions were approved by the Governor and take effect on July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 115-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/CS/SB 922 — Current and Former Military Personnel

by Criminal Justice Committee; Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee; and Senators Bennett, Detert, Jones, Gaetz, Fasano, Bullard, Evers, Latvala, Haridopolos, Alexander, Altman, Benacquisto, Bogdanoff, Braynon, Dean, Diaz de la Portilla, Dockery, Flores, Garcia, Gardiner, Gibson, Hays, Joyner, Lynn, Margolis, Montford, Negron, Norman, Oelrich, Rich, Richter, Ring, Sachs, Simmons, Siplin, Smith, Sobel, Storms, Thrasher, and Wise

Governor's Medal of Merit

The bill amends s. 14.34, F.S., to modify the meaning of “exceptional meritorious service” as it relates to the Governor’s Medal of Merit to expand the eligibility of an individual to be selected to receive the medal.

If approved by the Governor, this provision takes effect July 1, 2012.

Encroachment

The bill amends s. 163.3175, F.S., to clarify provisions relating to military commanding officer comments on proposed land use changes that may have an impact on the mission of a military installation. The bill clarifies that commanding officer comments on proposed land use changes are advisory to the local government, and provides that the advisory comments must be based upon appropriate data and analyses provided with the comments. The bill also provides that the local government must consider a commanding officer’s comments, underlying studies, and reports in the same manner as comments received by other reviewing agencies representing interests that may be affected by proposed changes such as the environment, public schools, or transportation.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Property Tax Exemption for Deployed Servicemembers

Section 196.173, F.S., provides an exemption for servicemembers that are deployed outside the continental United States, Alaska, or Hawaii in support of certain named military operations. Currently, the list of qualifying operations includes Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn. The beginning and ending dates for each operation are identified.

The bill updates the list of military operations that qualify for the deployed service-member exemption. The bill provides an ending date for Operation New Dawn, which ended on December 15, 2011. The statute is also amended to provide for two new qualifying operations – Operation Noble Eagle, which began on September 15, 2001, and Operation Odyssey Dawn, which began on March 19, 2011 and ended on October 31, 2011.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law and first apply to ad valorem tax rolls for 2012.

Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council

The bill amends s. 265.003, F.S., to create the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council (Council) within the Florida Department of Veterans (FDVA). The Council is created to serve as an advisory body tasked with annually accepting nominations of persons to be considered for induction into the existing Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame. The Council is required to annually transmit a list of 20 nominees to the FDVA for submission to the Governor and Cabinet, who select the nominees to be inducted.

The Council consists of 7 honorably discharged veterans in which the Governor, the Attorney General, the Chief Financial Officer, the Commissioner of Agriculture, the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the executive director of the FDVA each appoint one member to the Council. Members of the Council are prohibited from receiving compensation for their services, but are entitled to reimbursement for travel expenses incurred in the performance of their duties. However, the bill prohibits state funds from being used for travel reimbursement purposes.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Grants for Military Base Retention

Current law provides for seven defense-related grant programs administered by the Department of Economic Opportunity to assist defense-dependent communities in their transition from a defense economy to a non-defense economy in light of the federal BRAC process. In an effort to expand the scope of these grant programs to include military base retention and to consolidate programs that have not been funded or implemented since its enactment, the bill amends s. 288.980, F.S., to streamline the existing seven programs into three comprehensive programs – the Military Base Protection Program; the Florida Defense Reinvestment Grant Program; and the Florida Defense Infrastructure Grant Program.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Florida Defense Support Task Force

The bill repeals s. 288.987, F.S., which established the Florida Council for Military Base and Mission Support (Council) and creates a type two transfer of the authority, rights, responsibilities, rules and all other resources of the Council to the Florida Defense Support Task Force (Task Force). In addition, the bill transfers the Council's exemption from public records and public meetings requirements relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the state's military bases and strategies to the Task Force.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.

Florida Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act

The bill amends s. 295.187, F.S., to expand the “Florida Service-Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act” to include certain businesses owned and operated by wartime veterans and renames the act the “Florida Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act.” The bill entitles certain wartime veteran business owners to vendor preference and other benefits currently available to certified service-disabled veteran business owners. In order to be eligible for the benefits provided under the Florida Veteran Business Enterprise Opportunity Act, a wartime veteran business owner must meet the definition of “wartime veteran” as defined in the bill and meet the certification requirements by the Office of Supplier Diversity within the Department of Management Services.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Special Use License Plates

The bill amends s. 320.089, F.S., to authorize the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to issue a special use license plate for a recipient of the Combat Infantry Badge, as well as Vietnam War Veterans and Korean Conflict Veterans. These special use license plates are to be issued upon application and proof of qualifications and upon payment of the license tax imposed by s. 329.08, F.S.

The bill also provides for the issuance of a special use license plate for recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross, Navy Cross, Air Force Cross, or Silver Star. These special use license plates are to be issued upon application and proof of qualifications and without payment of the license tax imposed by s. 329.08, F.S.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect October 1, 2012.

Purple Heart Day

The bill designates August 7 of each year as “Purple Heart Day.” It authorizes the Governor to annually issue a proclamation designating August 7 as Purple Heart Day and also encourages public officials, schools, private organizations, and all residents of the state to commemorate Purple Heart Day and to honor those wounded or killed while serving in any branch of the United States Armed Forces.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

T. Patt Maney Veterans’ Treatment Intervention Act

The bill authorizes the chief judge of each judicial circuit to establish a Military Veterans and Servicemembers Court Program (Program) for veterans and servicemembers who are convicted of a criminal offense and who suffer from a mental illness, traumatic brain injury (TBI), substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem as a result of their military service. Under the Program, a judge may sentence such veterans and servicemembers in a way that addresses the severity of the condition through services targeted to the individual's needs.

The bill also authorizes a court to impose a condition of supervision requiring probationers or community controllees whose crime was committed on or after July 1, 2012, and who is a veteran or servicemember who suffers from a military-related mental illness, TBI, substance abuse disorder, or psychological problem, to participate in a treatment program capable of treating the offender. Finally, the bill adds both felony and misdemeanor pre-trial intervention programs as eligible treatment programs for veterans and servicemembers.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Postsecondary Education Course Registration for Veterans

The bill requires public postsecondary institutions that offer priority course registration to a segment of the student population to provide priority course registration to veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces who are receiving GI Bill educational benefits. The bill also allows for a veteran's spouse or dependent children to whom the GI Bill educational benefits have been transferred to be granted priority course registration. Additionally, the bill encourages independent postsecondary institutions to provide the same benefit of priority course registration to veterans and their dependents as public postsecondary institutions are required to provide under the bill.

The bill will enable veterans who are utilizing GI Bill educational benefits to have greater access to available courses, thereby decreasing the number of excess hours taken by veterans and reducing the time to graduation.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Road Designations

The bill creates a number of honorary designations of transportation facilities around the state. Designations are as follows:

- U.S. Highway 19/27A/98/State Road 55 between the Suwannee River Bridge and N.E. 592nd Street/Chavous Road/Kate Green Road in Dixie County is designated as "SP4 Thomas Berry Corbin Memorial Highway."
- U.S. Highway 19/98/State Road 55 between N.E. 592nd Street/Chavous Road/Kate Green Road and N.E. 170th Street in Dixie County is designated as "U.S. Navy BMC Samuel Calhoun Chavous, Jr., Memorial Highway."
- State Road 24 between County Road 347 and Bridge Number 340053 in Levy County is designated as "Marine Lance Corporal Brian R. Buesing Memorial Highway."

- U.S. Highway 19/98/State Road 55/S. Main Street between N.W. 1st Avenue and S.E. 2nd Avenue in Levy County is designated as “United States Army Sergeant Karl A. Campbell Memorial Highway.”
- U.S. Highway 27A/State Road 500/Hathaway Avenue between State Road 24/Thrasher Drive and Town Court in Levy County is designated as “U.S. Army SPC James A. Page Memorial Highway.”
- The portion of State Road 101/Mayport Road between State Road A1A and Wonderwood Connector in Duval County is designated as “USS Stark Memorial Drive.”
- The portion of State Road 44 in Lake County between U.S. Highway 441 and State Road 44/East Orange Avenue near Eustis is designated as “Captain Jim Reynolds, Jr., USAF ‘Malibu’ Road.”
- The portion of State Road 19 in Putnam County between U.S. 17/State Road 15 and Carriage Drive is designated as “Veterans Memorial Highway.”
- The portion of State Road 513 between Banana River Drive and Eau Gallie Boulevard in Brevard County is designated as “U.S. Army Sergeant Robert Daniel Sanchez Memorial Highway.”
- The portion of State Road A1A between Pinetree Drive and Eau Gallie Boulevard in Brevard County is designated as “U.S. Marine Corps Corporal Dustin Schrage Highway.”
- The portion of State Road 20/John Sims Parkway (57-040-000) between State Road 85 and the Walton County Line in Okaloosa County is designated as “Purple Heart Memorial Highway.”

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 117-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 1165 — Identification Cards and Driver Licenses

by Economic Affairs Committee; and Rep. McBurney (CS/CS/SB 1298 by Transportation Committee; Budget Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development Appropriations; and Senator Detert)

Current law provides an honorably discharged veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces the choice of obtaining a driver license or identification card that exhibits a capital “V” to signify status as a veteran. A veteran may obtain the permanent designation upon the renewal of the credential or upon purchasing a replacement credential if the veteran would like to obtain the permanent designation before the credential is up for renewal. To obtain the permanent designation, a veteran must pay a \$1 fee in addition to the standard fees required for the renewal or replacement of the credential and present his or her DD Form 214 to prove status as a veteran.

The bill amends ss. 322.051 and 322.14, F.S., to allow a veteran to obtain a replacement driver license or identification card with a capital “V” displayed upon the payment of a \$2 fee. The veteran would not be required to pay the standard fee associated with obtaining a replacement credential provided that the veteran is not conducting any other transactions affecting the credential the veteran seeks to obtain. The bill will allow a veteran to obtain a replacement credential for \$2 that signifies veteran status prior to the veteran’s normal renewal period, thus avoiding the standard fee to obtain a replacement credential.

The bill also expands the acceptable forms a veteran must present to the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles to show status as an honorably discharged veteran. The bill authorizes other forms specified by the Department of Veterans’ Affairs in addition to the DD Form 214.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 115-0

Committee on Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

HB 7075 — Military Installations

by Community and Military Affairs Subcommittee and Rep. Workman (SB 2076 by Military Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee and Senator Lynn)

Encroachment

The bill amends s. 163.3175, F.S., to clarify provisions relating to military commanding officer comments on proposed land use changes that may have an impact on the mission of a military installation. The bill clarifies that commanding officer comments on proposed land use changes are advisory to the local government, and provides that the advisory comments must be based upon appropriate data and analyses provided with the comments. The bill also provides that the local government must consider a commanding officer's comments, underlying studies, and reports in the same manner as comments received by other reviewing agencies representing interests that may be affected by proposed changes such as the environment, public schools, or transportation.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Grants for Military Base Retention

Current law provides for seven defense-related grant programs administered by the Department of Economic Opportunity to assist defense-dependent communities in their transition from a defense economy to a non-defense economy in light of the federal BRAC process. In an effort to expand the scope of these grant programs to include military base retention and to consolidate programs that have not been funded or implemented since its enactment, the bill amends s. 288.980, F.S., to streamline the existing seven programs into three comprehensive programs – the Military Base Protection Program; the Florida Defense Reinvestment Grant Program; and the Florida Defense Infrastructure Grant Program.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2012.

Florida Defense Support Task Force

The bill repeals s. 288.987, F.S., which established the Florida Council for Military Base and Mission Support (Council) and creates a type two transfer of the authority, rights, responsibilities, rules and all other resources of the Council to the Florida Defense Support Task Force (Task Force). In addition, the bill transfers the Council's exemption from public records and public meetings requirements relating to the strengths and weaknesses of the state's military bases and strategies to the Task Force.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.

Vote: Senate 38-1; House 116-0