

SENATE STAFF ANALYSIS AND ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee

BILL: SPB 7014

INTRODUCER: For consideration by Military Affairs and Domestic Security Committee

SUBJECT: Service Members/Dependents' Assistance

DATE: January 25, 2007

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Pardue</u>	<u>Skelton</u>	_____	Pre-meeting
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____

I. Summary:

Emergency assistance funds can be awarded to eligible family members and dependents of members of the Florida National Guard and United State Reserve Forces personnel who are residents of Florida and who are deployed on active duty in support of the Global War on Terrorism. This bill provides for a specified end-date to apply for benefits under the Family Readiness Program assistance fund upon return from eligible active duty.

The bill also provides for a change in the number of specified audit reviews of the Family Readiness Program assistance fund currently required by Section 250.5206, Florida Statutes (F.S.).

There are no additional funds appropriated in this bill.

This bill amends section 250.5206 of the Florida Statutes.

II. Present Situation:

Chapter 2005-51, Laws of Florida, directed the Department of Military Affairs to establish a state Family Readiness Program. The purpose of the program is to provide need-based assistance to Florida resident family members and dependents of service members of the Florida National Guard and United States Reserve Forces, including the Coast Guard Reserve. The intent is to provide assistance to families of Guard and Reserve Force personnel who are serving on active duty in support of the Global War on Terrorism and are federally deployed or participating in state operations for homeland defense.

Under the program, an award of up to \$5,000 may be made in an emergency situation to purchase critically needed services, including, but not limited to: reasonable living expenses, housing, vehicles, equipment or renovations necessary to meet disability needs, and healthcare.¹

For example:

- Reasonable living expenses – where critically needed to prevent termination of utilities, to provide food, or furnish similar basic necessities.
- Housing – includes emergency repairs to the service member’s primary residence that are critically needed to address health or safety issues, and assistance with mortgage and rent expenses where need-based and determined to be appropriate after review by the Area Family Center Support Specialist.
- Vehicles – repairs essential to maintain one vehicle per family in safe operating condition.
- Disability – equipment or renovations necessary to meet disability needs. Medical documentation is required.
- Healthcare – documented by medical authority as essential for the health and welfare of the individual, not elective, and not covered by other medical/dental insurance.

The Family Readiness Program can provide assistance to family members who have suffered catastrophic losses during a hurricane, among other circumstances, while the service member is deployed.

Applications for assistance are validated by one of the eight Area Family Center Support Specialists located throughout the state at a state armory or by a designated official at a reserve facility. They are forwarded, with a recommendation of approval or disapproval, by the local commander to the Program Director for review. Officials at the Florida National Guard headquarters receive the application from the Program Director and are authorized to award funds. There are procedures in place to expedite the review process due to the emergency nature of an application.

Section 250.5206, F.S., describes eligible recipients as persons designated as beneficiaries on the United States Department of Defense Form 93, or who are otherwise dependents of eligible service members, and who are residents of the State of Florida. Department of Defense (DOD) Form 93 is the Record of Emergency Data form used by service members and DOD civilian personnel (including contractors) to provide emergency contact information. Service members also use the form to designate beneficiaries for certain benefits such as death gratuity benefits.²

The Department of Military Affairs states that service members are generally not deployable for a period of 120 days upon return from federal military orders. This allows for time to address any medical problems, complete administrative requirements, and return to normal family life.

Section 250.5206, F.S., requires the department’s inspector general to conduct a monthly audit review of the program. The department believes this level of review is inefficient and could be

¹ Florida National Guard Pamphlet 930-4, July 1, 2006.

² Department of Defense Instruction, 3001.02, August 8, 2006.

replaced by a semi-annual review/audit process that will still provide adequate program oversight.

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

This bill provides for an end-date to request assistance from the Family Readiness Program assistance fund. Eligibility will continue for a period of 120 days following termination of the service member's military orders for qualifying service and return to home of record in Florida.

The bill deletes the requirement for a monthly audit review of the program and replaces it with a requirement for a semi-annual review and an annual audit by the department's inspector general.

The bill provides for an effective date of July 1, 2007.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

V. Economic Impact and Fiscal Note:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The Department of Military Affairs has received \$5 million in appropriated funds for the Family Readiness Program since its inception in FY 2005-2006. Chapter 2006-25, Laws of Florida, provided for the carry-over of unexpended funds appropriated by Chapter 2005-51, Laws of Florida, into FY 2006-2007. To date, approximately \$460,000 have been expended in administering the program.³

³ Source- Florida Department of Military Affairs.

Currently, approximately 1,200 National Guard personnel are serving overseas in support of the Global War on Terrorism. An additional 500 to 600 personnel are expected to be tasked to deploy overseas in the future. These personnel and their families as well as reserve forces personnel and their families are the intended recipients of Family Readiness Program assistance funds.⁴

The changes proposed in this bill impose a deadline for application for assistance funds upon return to Florida from active duty in support of the Global War on Terrorism. No additional fiscal impact is expected from this change.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

This Senate staff analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

⁴ Note: According the Department of Military Affairs, such benefits are taxable under U. S. Internal Revenue Service rules.

VIII. Summary of Amendments:

None.

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