

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 435 Veterans Employment and Training

SPONSOR(S): Sirois and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 586

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 118 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 435 passed the House on April 15, 2021, and subsequently passed the Senate on April 26, 2021.

Veterans Florida, a non-profit corporation within the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, was created to promote Florida as a veteran-friendly state. Veterans Florida encourages and assists retired and recently separated military personnel to keep or make Florida their permanent residence, helps equip veterans for employment opportunities, and promotes the hiring of veterans.

Veterans Florida administers the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program to assist in linking veterans in search of employment with businesses seeking to hire dedicated, well-trained workers. The purpose of the program is to meet the workforce demands of businesses in the state by facilitating access to training and education in high-demand fields for veterans.

The Department of Defense (DoD) SkillBridge program provides opportunities for eligible servicemembers transitioning to civilian employment to train and learn with an industry partner that best matches that applicant's military position training and work experience. This training occurs within the servicemember's final 180 days of military service. The program's goal is to enhance the servicemember's marketability and post-separation career prospects following separation from duty.

The bill directs Veterans Florida, through its Veterans Employment and Training Services Program, to serve as the state's principal assistance organization under the SkillBridge program. In order to facilitate the administration of the SkillBridge program, Veterans Florida is required to:

- Establish and maintain its certification for the SkillBridge program or any other similar workforce training and transition programs established by DoD;
- Educate businesses, business associations, and transitioning servicemembers on the SkillBridge program and its benefits, as well as educate military command and personnel within the state on the opportunities available to transitioning servicemembers through the program;
- Assist businesses in obtaining approval for skilled workforce training curricula under the SkillBridge program, including, but not limited to, apprenticeships, internships, and fellowships; and
- Match eligible transitioning servicemembers with training opportunities offered by Veterans Florida or participating businesses with the intent of having transitioning servicemembers achieve gainful employment in Florida upon completion of their SkillBridge training.

The bill does not appear to have a fiscal impact on the state or local governments.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 4, 2021, ch. 2021-66, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2021.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Present Situation

Servicemembers Transitioning to Civilian Status

Each year, about 200,000 servicemembers end military service as veterans and either reenter the civilian workforce or enroll in higher education.¹ Florida is home to 20 military installations² and 65,267 military personnel.³ Florida also has the nation's third-largest veteran⁴ population with roughly 1.5 million veterans.⁵ A significant number of these veterans are recently transitioned servicemembers.⁶

Veterans Florida

Veterans Florida,⁷ a non-profit corporation within the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, was created to promote Florida as a veteran-friendly state.⁸ Veterans Florida encourages and assists retired and recently separated military personnel to keep or make Florida their permanent residence, helps equip veterans for employment opportunities, and promotes the hiring of veterans.⁹

Duties of Veterans Florida include:¹⁰

- Conducting research to identify the target market and the educational and employment needs of veterans and contract with at least one entity to perform the research.
- Advising the Florida Tourism Industry Marketing Corporation on:
 - The target market;
 - Development and implementation of a marketing campaign to encourage servicemembers to remain in Florida or to make Florida their permanent residence; and
 - Methods for disseminating information to the target market that relate to interests and needs of veterans and facilitate veterans' knowledge of and access to benefits.
- Promoting and enhancing the value of military skill sets to businesses.
- Implementing the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program.
- Managing all appropriated funds to ensure the use of such funds conforms to all applicable laws, bylaws, or contractual requirements.

Veterans Employment and Training Services Program

Veterans Florida administers the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program to assist in linking veterans in search of employment with businesses seeking to hire dedicated, well-trained

¹ Department of Defense SkillBridge, *Industry Partners and Employers*, <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/industry-employers.htm> (last visited March 26, 2021).

² Enterprise Florida, *Florida's Military Profile*, https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/Military_Install_Map.pdf (last visited March 26, 2021).

³ Florida Defense Support Task Force, *Florida Defense Factbook Quick Comparison*, (2020), <https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/FactBook-Quick-Comparison-Flier-2020.pdf> (last visited March 26, 2021).

⁴ Section 1.01(14), F.S., defines a "veteran" as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under honorable conditions, or who later received an upgraded discharge under honorable conditions.

⁵ *Supra* at 3.

⁶ Department of Veterans Affairs, *2021 Legislative Bill Analysis (HB 435)*; on file with Local Administration & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee.

⁷ In 2015, the Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., Board of Directors approved the fictitious name "Veterans Florida." See at <http://dos.sunbiz.org/scripts/ficidet.exe?action=DETREG&docnum=G15000027981&rdocnum=G15000027981> (last visited March 26, 2021). See also s. 295.21(5)(e), F.S.

⁸ S. 295.21(1), F.S.

⁹ S. 295.21(2), F.S.

¹⁰ S. 295.21(3), F.S.

workers.¹¹ The purpose of the program is to meet the workforce demands of businesses in the state by facilitating access to training and education in high-demand fields for veterans.¹²

Functions of the program include:¹³

- Conducting marketing and recruiting efforts directed at veterans who reside in or who have an interest in relocating to Florida and who are seeking employment;
- Assisting veterans who reside in or relocate to Florida and who are seeking employment;
- Assisting Florida businesses in recruiting and hiring veterans;
- Creating a grant program to provide funding to assist veterans in meeting the workforce-skill needs of businesses seeking to hire, promote, or generally improve specialized skills of veterans, establishing criteria for approval of requests for funding, and maximizing the use of funding for the grant program; and
- Contracting with one or more entities to administer an entrepreneur initiative program for veterans in Florida that connects business leaders with veterans seeking to become entrepreneurs.

SkillBridge Program

The Department of Defense (DoD) SkillBridge program grants servicemembers¹⁴ an opportunity to “gain valuable civilian work experience through specific industry training, apprenticeships, or internships” by matching civilian opportunities to a servicemember’s job training and work experience.¹⁵ The goal of providing these opportunities is to enhance the servicemember’s marketability and post-separation career prospects following separation from duty.¹⁶ Any rank, enlisted person, or officer may apply. Military spouses and veterans may also participate on a space available basis; however, the DoD will not provide pay, allowances, benefits, or other program support to the military spouse or veteran.¹⁷

The servicemember is permitted to use up to the last 180 days of service to train and learn with an industry partner that best matches that applicant’s job training and work experience. The training must offer the servicemember a high probability of employment. Throughout the SkillBridge program partnership, the servicemember continues to receive military compensation and benefits. Eligibility for the SkillBridge program is mission-dependent and must be authorized by the unit commander prior to entering into any agreement with interested industry employment partners.¹⁸

All industry partners and employers interested in participating in the SkillBridge program must first be reviewed and cleared by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Force Education and Training, sign a Memorandum of Understanding, and meet certain general qualifying criteria.¹⁹

Veterans Florida has begun to expand its SkillBridge program fellowship offerings with employers to serve transitioning active duty servicemembers, particularly in agriculture, in partnership with the

¹¹ S. 295.22, F.S.

¹² S. 295.22(2), F.S.

¹³ S. 295.22(3), F.S.

¹⁴ The term “servicemember” is generally referred to as being on “active duty.” 10 USC s. 101 defines “active duty” as full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. The term includes full-time training duty, annual training duty, and attendance, while in the active military service. The term does not include full-time National Guard duty.

¹⁵ Department of Defense SkillBridge, Program Overview, <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/program-overview.htm> (last visited March 26, 2021).

¹⁶ Department of Defense SkillBridge, *Military Members*, <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/military-members.htm> (last visited March 26, 2021).

¹⁷ Department of Defense SkillBridge, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/faq.htm> (last visited March 26, 2021).

¹⁸ *Supra* at 16.

¹⁹ Department of Defense, SkillBridge, *SkillBridge Program Types and Criteria*, p. 1, <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/docs/SkillBridge-Program-Criteria-and-Types.pdf> (last visited March 26, 2021).

University of Florida. Veterans Florida intends to expand into other industries.²⁰ Currently, there are 40 entities providing SkillBridge program training in 53 locations in Florida, including Veterans Florida.²¹

In 2018, the Virginia Chamber Foundation, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, and the Navy Region Mid-Atlantic²² formed a joint initiative called the “HIRE VETS NOW” Fellowship Program (Fellowship Program). The Fellowship Program is an approved SkillBridge program allowing transitioning servicemembers to intern with approved Virginia Values Veterans Certified companies. The Virginia Values Veterans Program is part of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services Program.²³

Effect of the Bill

The bill directs Veterans Florida, through its Veterans Employment and Training Services Program, to serve as the state’s principal assistance organization under the SkillBridge program. In order to facilitate the administration of the SkillBridge program, Veterans Florida is required to:

- Establish and maintain its certification for the SkillBridge program or any other similar workforce training and transition programs established by DoD;
- Educate businesses, business associations, and transitioning servicemembers on the SkillBridge program and its benefits, as well as educate military command and personnel within the state on the opportunities available to transitioning servicemembers through the program;
- Assist businesses in obtaining approval for skilled workforce training curricula under the SkillBridge program, including, but not limited to, apprenticeships, internships, and fellowships; and
- Match eligible transitioning servicemembers with training opportunities offered by Veterans Florida or participating businesses with the intent of having transitioning servicemembers achieve gainful employment in Florida upon completion of their SkillBridge training.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

²⁰ Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs, *Quarterly Report for the First Quarter of the 2020-2021 Fiscal Year*, p. 16 (Nov. 20, 2020), <https://floridavets.org/leadership/quarterly-report/> (last visited March 26, 2021).

²¹ Email from Joe Marino, Executive Director of Veterans Florida (Feb. 8, 2021). On file with Local Administration & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee staff.

²² The naval shore installation management headquarters for the Mid-Atlantic region, which encompasses 20 states, 14 installations, and 50 Naval Operational Support Centers. See <https://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrma.html> (last visited March 26, 2021).

²³ Virginia Department of Veterans Services, *Hire Vets Now Fellowship Program*, <https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/news-room/virginia-chamber-foundation-virginia-department-of-veterans-services-and-navy-region-mid-atlantic-partner-to-launch-hire-vets-now-fellowship-program> (last visited March 26, 2021).

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

The bill may have a positive impact on transitioning servicemembers who have the opportunity to gain civilian work experience through training, apprenticeships, or internships during their last 180 days of service at no cost to the servicemember.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.