

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Appropriations

BILL: SB 586

INTRODUCER: Senator Wright and others

SUBJECT: Veterans Employment and Training

DATE: April 21, 2021

REVISED: _____

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Caldwell</u>	<u>MS</u>	Favorable
2.	<u>McMillan</u>	<u>McKay</u>	<u>CM</u>	Favorable
3.	<u>Gerbrandt</u>	<u>Sadberry</u>	<u>AP</u>	Pre-meeting

I. Summary:

SB 586 designates Florida is for Veterans as the state's principal assistance organization under the United States Department of Defense's (department) SkillBridge program for employers and transitioning servicemembers.

In its role under the SkillBridge program, Florida is for Veterans is required to:

- Establish and maintain its certification for either the SkillBridge program or a similar workforce training and transition program established by the department;
- Educate businesses, business associations, and transitioning servicemembers on the SkillBridge program and its benefits, and educate military command and personnel within the state on opportunities available to transitioning servicemembers through the program;
- Assist businesses in obtaining approval for skilled workforce training curricula under the program, including apprenticeships, internships, or fellowships; and
- Match transitioning servicemembers who are deemed eligible for program participation by their military command with training opportunities offered by Florida is for Veterans or participating businesses, with the intent of having transitioning servicemembers achieve gainful employment in the state upon completion of their training.

The bill takes effect on July 1, 2021.

II. Present Situation:

Transitioning Servicemembers

Each year, about 200,000 servicemembers end military service as veterans and either reenter the civilian workforce or enroll in higher education.¹ Nationally, Florida has the third largest veteran population, with more than 1.5 million veterans. A significant number of these veterans are recently transitioned servicemembers.²

For example, for Fiscal Year 2019, the number of servicemembers transitioning into the workforce by duty location in the state was as follows:³

Duty Location	Servicemembers Transitioning
Pensacola NAS	768
NAS Whiting Field Milton	84
Hurlburt Field ABS FL	1,096
Eglin AFB	852
Tyndall AFB	488
NS Mayport	141
NAS Jacksonville	1,341
Patrick AFB	259
Macdill AFB	546
Miami	71
NAS Key West	176

Federal Programs for Transitioning Servicemembers

Transition Assistance Program

The Transition Assistance Program provides transitioning servicemembers employment information, tools, and training through a cooperative effort among the Department of Labor, and the Departments of Defense, Education, Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management.⁴ Workshop offerings include a mandatory one-day employment preparation workshop for transitioning servicemembers, and optional two-day workshops in career exploration and technical career preparation or general employment preparation.⁵

The U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) Apprenticeship Pilot (Pilot) introduces apprenticeship to transitioning servicemembers during the Transition Assistance Program workshops. The Pilot provides counseling, apprenticeship

¹ Department of Defense SkillBridge, *Industry Partners and Employers*, available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/industry-employers.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

² Department of Veterans Affairs, *2021 Legislative Bill Analysis (SB 586)* (Jan. 25, 2021) (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

³ *Id.*

⁴ U.S. Dep't of Labor, *Veterans' Employment and Training Service, Transition Assistance Program*, available at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/tap> (last visited March 8, 2021).

⁵ *Id.*

opportunities, and placement services to transitioning servicemembers and their spouses who are interested in an apprenticeship after separating from the military. The Pilot launched April 2020 and runs through April 2021.⁶

SkillBridge

The Department of Defense SkillBridge program connects servicemembers with participating companies that provide training, apprenticeships, and internships. A servicemember is eligible to participate during his or her last 180 days of military service. Once approved, a unit commander authorizes the servicemember up to 180 days of permissive leave for the servicemember to gain civilian experience with an industry participant.⁷ Companies benefit at no cost, and the servicemember continues to receive military compensation.

For servicemembers, SkillBridge provides a chance to work and learn in civilian career areas, and can help bridge the gap between the end of service and the beginning of civilian careers.⁸

Guard and Reserve members are also eligible to participate in SkillBridge, and if space is available, a veteran or a military spouse may seek a position in SkillBridge.⁹

To view opportunities, SkillBridge maintains an online platform of listings submitted by industry partners.¹⁰ As of January 14, 2021, 52 SkillBridge programs operate in Florida.¹¹ An additional listing is provided of organizations that have been authorized by the Department of Defense through a “Memorandum of Understanding” to work with each of the branches of the military and installation commanders to develop SkillBridge training programs for their personnel. Florida is for Veterans is one of the 5 approved organizations in Florida.¹²

Florida Is For Veterans

The Florida Legislature created Florida is for Veterans, also known as Veterans Florida, in 2014.¹³ Florida is for Veterans is a nonprofit that promotes the state as veteran-friendly by helping veterans adjust to civilian life through workplace and entrepreneurial assistance.¹⁴

⁶ Department of Labor, *Veterans’ Employment and Training Service Apprenticeship Pilot*, available at https://content.govdelivery.com/attachments/USDOL/2020/09/16/file_attachments/1547435/VETS-ApprenticeshipPilot-Sept2020.pdf (last visited March 10, 2021).

⁷ Department of Defense SkillBridge, *What is SkillBridge? Program Overview*, available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/program-overview.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Department of Defense, *SkillBridge, Frequently Asked Questions*; available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/faq.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

¹⁰ Department of Defense, *SkillBridge Locations*, available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/locations.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

¹¹ Department of Veterans Affairs, *2021 Legislative Bill Analysis (SB 586)* (Jan. 25, 2021) (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

¹² Department of Defense, *Authorized SkillBridge Organizations*, available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/organizations.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021). The other approved organizations are Florida Homes Realty & Mortgage, JDog Junk Removal and Hauling - MVP Florida East, Northeast Florida Builders Association (NEFBA) Apprenticeship Training Program, and State College Florida Manatee - Sarasota - 26 West Business Incubator.

¹³ Section 12, ch. 2014-1, Laws of Fla.

¹⁴ Section 295.21(2), F.S.

Florida is for Veterans operates a variety of training and employment assistance programs, including an Entrepreneurship Program, a Workforce Training Grant Program, a Veteran Agriculture Program, and training during military service by industry partners through the United States Department of Defense SkillBridge program.

Entrepreneurship Program

Almost one in four active duty servicemembers wants to open their own business.¹⁵ The Entrepreneurship Program offers veterans online and on-site instruction, facilitation, and mentorship. Since the program began in early 2016, more than 3,200 veterans have applied, and 1,704 have been served.¹⁶

Workforce Training Grant

The Workforce Grant reimburses qualified employers up to fifty percent of industry skills-based training costs (maximum of \$8,000 per trainee) for new or current employees.¹⁷ Approved training can be provided by third parties, in house corporate, or on the job training. Preference should be given to targeted industry businesses¹⁸ and to businesses in the defense supply, cloud virtualization, or commercial aviation manufacturing industries.¹⁹

Agriculture Program

The Veterans Florida Agriculture Program is an intensive six-month internship that educates veterans about modern agriculture production practices.²⁰ Participants intern at the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Research and Education Centers located across Florida and can receive \$15 per hour to participate. Funding is provided through a U.S. Department of Agriculture grant titled Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Program.^{21 22}

SkillBridge

Florida is for Veterans, in partnership with the University of Florida, has started to expand SkillBridge fellowship offerings with employers to serve transitioning active-duty

¹⁵ Veterans Florida, *Annual Report 2020*, pg. 13, available at <https://www.veteransflorida.org/about/> (last visited March 8, 2021).

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ The program was expanded in 2018 to allow training grants be awarded to businesses that promote and improve skills of veterans, rather than only to businesses that hire veterans. See section 4 Ch. 2018-7, L.O.F.

¹⁸ These are high-skill industries producing goods or services and wages generally 125 percent above state or local wages with a strong expectation for future growth in both employment and output. See s. 288.106(q), F.S.

¹⁹ Section 295.22(3)(d), F.S.

²⁰ Veterans Florida, *Agriculture Program*, available at <https://www.veteransflorida.org/agriculture/> (last visited March 10, 2021).

²¹ The Enhancing Agricultural Opportunities for Military Veterans Program provides grants to non-profits to increase the number of military veterans gaining knowledge and skills through comprehensive, hands-on and immersive model farm and ranch programs offered regionally that lead to successful careers in the food and agricultural sector, available at <https://nifa.usda.gov/program/enhancing-agricultural-opportunities-military-veterans-agvets#:~:text=The%20Enhancing%20Agricultural%20Opportunities%20for%20Military%20Veterans%20Program,successful%20careers%20in%20the%20food%20and%20agricultural%20sector> (last visited April 20, 2021).

²² *Supra* note 17.

servicemembers.²³ On Feb. 10, 2021, the Florida Chamber of Commerce announced a partnership with Florida is for Veterans to launch a new coalition that will help servicemembers prepare to transition back into the workforce.²⁴ The coalition's mission will be to promote SkillBridge to employers and transitioning servicemembers, and to assist businesses with obtaining SkillBridge approval for skilled workforce training.²⁵ Another focus of the coalition will be on high-tech opportunities.²⁶

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

The bill designates Florida is for Veterans as the state's principal assistance organization under the United States Department of Defense's (department) SkillBridge program for employers and transitioning servicemembers.

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IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

The bill does not appear to require cities and counties to expend funds or limit their authority to raise revenue or receive state-shared revenues as specified by Article VII, Section 18 of the State Constitution.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

²³ Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Quarterly Report for the First Quarter of the 2020-2021 Fiscal Year*, pg. 16 (Nov. 20, 2020), available at <https://floridavets.org/leadership/quarterly-report/> (last visited March 8, 2021).

²⁴ Jordan Kirkland, The Capitolist, *Industry leaders form coalition to help servicemembers transition to civilian life* (Feb. 10, 2021), available at <https://thecapitolist.com/industry-leaders-form-coalition-to-help-servicemembers-transition-to-civilian-life/> (last visited March 8, 2021).

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ *Id.*

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

There are currently five organizations in Florida authorized by the Office of the Deputy Secretary of Defense through an official Memorandum of Understanding to work with each branch of the military and its respective installation commanders to develop SkillBridge training programs for their personnel. It is unclear what, if any, impact designating one of these organizations as the principal assistance organization will have on other participants in the program.

Designating Florida is for Veterans as the principal assistance organization for SkillBridge may make it easier for both industry partners and servicemembers to access a single point of entry, thereby increasing the likelihood of participation.

C. Government Sector Impact:

SB 586 creates new duties for Florida is for Veterans. Currently, Florida is for Veterans receives nonrecurring general revenue funding for the Workforce Training Grant and the Entrepreneur Training Grant. Without an additional appropriation, it is a possibility that grant funds will be redirected to the Skillbridge program.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends the following sections of the Florida Statutes: 295.21 and 295.22.

IX. Additional Information:

- A. **Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:**
(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

- B. **Amendments:**

None.

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