

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 Commerce and Tourism

BILL: SB 586

INTRODUCER: Senator Wright and others

SUBJECT: Veterans Employment and Training

DATE: March 8, 2021

REVISED: _____

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

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 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 July 1, 2021.

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

Florida Is For Veterans

The Florida Legislature created Florida is for Veterans, also known as Veterans Florida, in 2014.⁴ 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.⁵ Florida is for Veterans operates a variety of training and employment assistance programs, including an Entrepreneurship 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.⁶ The Entrepreneurship Program offers veterans online and on-site instruction, facilitation, and

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

⁵ Section 295.21(2), F.S.

⁶ Veterans Florida, *Annual Report 2020*, pg. 13; available at <https://www.veteransflorida.org/about/> (last visited March 8, 2021).

mentorship. Since the program began in early 2016, more than 3,200 veterans have applied, and 1,704 have been served.⁷

The Veterans Florida Agriculture Program

The Veterans Florida Agriculture Program is an intensive nine-month internship that educates veterans about modern agriculture production practice.⁸ For the first six months, participants intern at the University of Florida/Institute of Agricultural Sciences Research and Education Centers. After the first internship, participants receive a three month paid internship with local agribusinesses or farms. At the end of the program, Florida is for Veterans help the veterans receive a permanent placement.⁹

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 servicemembers.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² Another focus of the coalition will be on high-tech opportunities.¹³

Federal Programs for Transitioning Servicemembers

Transition Assistance Program

The Transition Assistance Program (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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ The program also initiated the Department of Labor VETS Apprenticeship Pilot to provide counseling, apprenticeship, and placement services

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.* at 15-16.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ 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).

¹¹ 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).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ 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).

¹⁵ *Id.*

to transitioning servicemembers and their spouses who are interested in apprenticeship after separating from employment.¹⁶

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.¹⁷ 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.¹⁸

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.¹⁹

To view opportunities, SkillBridge maintains an online platform of listings submitted by industry partners.²⁰ As of January 14, 2021, 52 SkillBridge programs operate in Florida.²¹ 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.²²

II. 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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- Establish and maintain its certification for either the Skillbridge program or a similar workforce training and transition program established by the department;

¹⁶ *Id.* The Pilot launched April 2020.

¹⁷ Department of Defense SkillBridge, *What is SkillBridge? Program Overview*, available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/program-overview.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Department of Defense, *SkillBridge, Frequently Asked Questions*; available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/faq.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

²⁰ Department of Defense, *SkillBridge Locations*, available at <https://dodskillbridge.usalearning.gov/locations.htm> (last visited March 8, 2021).

²¹ 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).

²² 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.

- 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.

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III. 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.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

E. Other Constitutional Issues:

None.

IV. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

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:

None.

V. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VI. Related Issues:

None.

VII. Statutes Affected:

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

VIII. 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.