

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF FINAL BILL ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 725 Veterans' Long-term Care Facilities Admissions

SPONSOR(S): Woodson, Snyder, and others

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 174

FINAL HOUSE FLOOR ACTION: 117 Y's 0 N's **GOVERNOR'S ACTION:** Approved

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

HB 725 passed the House on February 15, 2024, and subsequently passed the Senate on February 21, 2024.

Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) operates a network of nine veterans' homes and provides statewide outreach to connect veterans with services, benefits, and support. State veterans' homes may be either nursing homes or domiciliary homes. Both veterans of wartime service and of peacetime service are eligible for admission.

The bill expands the eligibility for residency at a state veterans' home to include the spouse or surviving spouse of a qualifying veteran. The bill revises the priority of admittance to veterans' homes and places the spouse or surviving spouse of a veteran last in priority. These rankings preserve a higher priority of admittance to veterans over non-veterans.

The bill does not have a fiscal impact on state or local government.

The bill was approved by the Governor on June 20, 2024, ch. 2024-250, L.O.F., and will become effective on July 1, 2024.

I. SUBSTANTIVE INFORMATION

A. EFFECT OF CHANGES:

Present Situation

The U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) is principally responsible for the delivery of health care services to veterans.¹ Eligibility for hospital, nursing home, and domiciliary care depends on a number of factors. Veterans qualify for specified health care services depending on disability status, time of service, active duty status during service, toxic exposure during service, annual income, and need for support.²

The Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) is a nearly 1,500-member constitutionally chartered³ department with a budget of \$201 million for FY 2023-2024.⁴ FDVA operates a network of nine state veterans' homes and provides statewide outreach to connect veterans with services, benefits, and support.⁵ FDVA offers benefits and services in the fields of health care, mental health and substance abuse, claims support, education, employment, housing, burial benefits, and legal assistance.⁶

Veterans Homes

The FDVA provides care for veterans' in both domiciliary homes⁷ and nursing facilities.⁸ Both veterans of wartime and peacetime service are eligible for admission.⁹ Veterans are admitted to both types of facilities based on a priority ranking.¹⁰ To be considered for admission to a veterans' home in Florida, a veteran must have been discharged from the military with either an honorable or an upgrade to an honorable discharge.¹¹

Domiciliary Homes

Domiciliary care is shelter, sustenance, and incidental medical care on an ambulatory self-care basis for eligible veterans who are disabled by age or disease, but not in need of hospitalization or nursing home care.¹² A domiciliary home is a type of assisted living facility (ALF).¹³

To be eligible for admission, a veteran must:

- Have wartime service or peacetime service.
- Be a resident of the state at the time of application.
- Not be mentally ill, habitually inebriated, or addicted to drugs.

¹ Florida Dept. of Veterans Affairs, *Health Care*, <https://www.floridavets.org/benefits-services/health-care/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2024).

² 38 U.S.C. § 1710.

³ Art. IV, s. 11, Fla. Const.

⁴ Ch. 2023-239, Laws of Florida.

⁵ Florida Dept. of Veterans Affairs, *Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs – Our Vision and Mission*, <https://www.floridavets.org/leadership/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2024).

⁶ Florida Department of Veterans Affairs, *Benefits & Services*, <https://www.floridavets.org/benefits-services/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2024).

⁷ A Veterans' Domiciliary Home of Florida is a home for veterans established by the state. Ss. 296.02 (10), and 296.03, F.S.

⁸ Ch. 296, F.S.

⁹ Ss. 296.08 and 296.36, F.S. "Wartime service" is defined as is service in any of the following campaigns or expeditions: Spanish - American War (1898-1902); Mexican Border Period (1916-1917); World War I (1917-1918, with qualifying extensions until 1921); World War II (1941-1946); Korean War (1950-1955); Vietnam War, (1961-1975); Persian Gulf War (1990-1992); Operation Enduring Freedom (2001-date prescribed by presidential proclamation or by law); Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-date prescribed by presidential proclamation or by law). Peacetime service is defined as any Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, Air Force, or Space Force service not in any of the campaigns or expeditions. S. 1.01(14), F.S.

¹⁰ Ss. 296.08 and 296.36, F.S.

¹¹ Ss. 296.02(9) and 1.01(14), F.S.

¹² S. 296.02(4), F.S.

¹³ See Florida Dept. of Veterans Affairs, *State Veterans' Homes*, <https://floridavets.org/locations/state-veterans-nursing-homes/> (last visited Feb. 22, 2024).

- Not owe money to FDVA for services rendered during a previous stay at a FDVA facility.
- Have applied for all financial assistance reasonably available through governmental sources.
- Have been approved as eligible for care and treatment by the VA.¹⁴

Residents are admitted in order of priority as follows:

- A veteran with wartime service who has a service-connected disability but is not in need of hospitalization or nursing home care.
- A veteran with wartime service who has a non-service-connected disability but is not in need of hospitalization or nursing home care.
- A veteran with wartime service and no disability.
- A veteran with peacetime service.¹⁵

An applicant must file with the facility administrator all information necessary for admission, including a certificate of eligibility, a certified copy of the veteran's discharge, and any other information the administrator determines is necessary.¹⁶

The FDVA currently operates one domiciliary home in Florida. The domiciliary home is located in Lake City, Florida.¹⁷

Nursing Homes

In addition to assisted-living facilities, Florida law provides for veterans' nursing homes.¹⁸ Each nursing home is overseen by an administrator who is selected by the executive director (director) of FDVA.¹⁹

To be eligible for admission, a veteran must:

- Be in need of nursing care.
- Be a resident of the state at the time of application.
- Not owe money to the FDVA for services rendered during a previous stay at a FDVA facility.
- Have applied for all financial assistance reasonably available through governmental sources.
- Have been approved as eligible for care and treatment by the VA.²⁰

Eligible veterans are given priority for admission in the following order:

- Residents of the state.
- Those who have a service-connected disability as determined by the VA, or who were discharged or released from service for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty and the disability is the condition for the nursing home need.
- Those who have a non-service-connected disability and are unable to defray the cost of nursing home care.²¹

The FDVA currently operates eight skilled nursing facilities throughout the state. The nursing homes are located in Daytona Beach, Orlando, Land O'Lakes, Pembroke Pines, Panama City, Port Charlotte, Port St. Lucie, and St. Augustine, Florida.²²

¹⁴ S. 296.06(2), F.S.,

¹⁵ S. 296.08, F.S.

¹⁶ S. 296.08(2), F.S.

¹⁷ See Florida Dept. of Veterans Affairs, *State Veterans' Homes*, *supra* n. 13 (describing care provided by the Robert H. Jenkins Jr. Veterans' Domiciliary Home located in Lake City).

¹⁸ Ch. 296, Part II, F.S.

¹⁹ S. 296.34, F.S.

²⁰ S. 296.36(1), F.S.

²¹ S. 296.36(3), F.S.

²² See Florida Dept. of Veterans Affairs, *State Veterans' Homes*, *supra* n. 13.

Cost and Funding of Resident Care

A resident of a state veterans' home must contribute to the cost of his or her care if the resident receives a pension, compensation, gratuity from the federal government, or income from any other source of more than \$100 per month for domiciliary homes and \$160 per month for nursing homes.²³

In addition to the resident's portion of payment, the VA provides a reimbursement care subsidy to domiciliary homes and nursing homes based on a per diem rate.²⁴ The current VA per diem for domiciliary homes is \$59.69 a day.²⁵ The current VA per diem for basic care in a nursing home is set at \$138.29 a day, while per diem for disabled veterans who are determined to be at least 70 percent disabled is set at \$474.45 a day.²⁶ To qualify for reimbursement, federal law requires at least 75 percent of the population of the facility to be veterans. This threshold drops to 50 percent if the facility was constructed or renovated solely by the state.

Federal law authorizes a state veterans' home to house non-veteran residents who are spouses of veterans or parents whose children died while in military service.²⁷ These residents are required to pay for the full cost of their care. However, Florida law does not allow the spouses of veterans to be admitted to state veterans' homes.

Effect of the Bill

The bill expands the eligibility for residency at state veterans' homes to include the spouse or surviving spouse of a qualifying veteran. The bill updates the priority order of admission to reflect this change, placing the spouse or surviving spouse last in the admission priority list, ensuring that higher priority of admittance will be given to veterans over non-veterans.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

The bill has no fiscal impact on FDVA or the state Medicaid program. While the VA does not cover the cost of care for spouses, FDVA will be reimbursed for services through private pay, Medicare, and the state Medicaid program.²⁸

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

²³ S. 296.10, F.S., and s. 296.37, F.S. This contribution for care may be 100 percent of the cost if an otherwise eligible veteran is able to fund his or her own support.

²⁴ 38 C.F.R. § 51.390 and 38 C.F.R. § 51.210.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Geriatric and Extended Care, State Home Per Diem Program, *State Home Per Diem Basic Rates for FYs 200-2024*, available at https://www.va.gov/geriatrics/pages/State_Veterans_Home_Program_per_diem.asp (last visited Feb. 22, 2024).

²⁶ Florida Dept. of Veterans' Affairs, *2023 Agency Legislative Bill Analysis, SB 174* (Nov. 7, 2023) (on file with the House Local Administration, Federal Affairs, & Special Districts Subcommittee).

²⁷ 38 C.F.R. § 51.210(d).

²⁸ *Supra* note 26.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

None.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

None.