

**By** the Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security; and Senator Collins

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to military affairs; amending s. 15.0465, F.S.; redesignating the official state flagship as the S.S. American Victory; amending s. 295.124, F.S.; updating a reference to federal law relating to the designation of the Department of Veterans' Affairs as the state approving agency for veterans' education and training; amending s. 295.21, F.S.; revising the membership of the board of directors of Florida is for Veterans, Inc.; conforming provisions to changes made by the act; amending s. 295.22, F.S.; renaming the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program administered by Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., as the Veterans Florida Opportunity Program; providing that grant reimbursements are limited to a specified amount per eligible trainee per fiscal year; deleting a provision that allowed for reimbursement of only permanent full-time employees; providing that training costs for a trainee must be equal to or greater than a specified amount; revising requirements for a grant agreement between the corporation and a business requesting funds; authorizing the use of grant funds as educational stipends for specified individuals while training at locations of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences; requiring Florida is for Veterans, Inc., and the university to enter into a grant agreement; requiring the corporation to determine the amount and structure of

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any educational stipend; specifying that such stipends be used only for specified training; providing an appropriation; creating s. 295.25, F.S.; prohibiting the Department of State from charging veterans who reside in this state fees for the filing of specified documents; limiting a veteran's use of the exemption; amending s. 320.084, F.S.; requiring that a free disabled veteran motor vehicle license plate be issued by the Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles for use on any motor vehicle owned or leased by certain disabled veterans; deleting the requirement that such plates be issued with the identifying letter designation of "DV"; authorizing the issuance of a military license plate or specialty license plate with a certain embossing; providing that certain protections and rights do apply to certain military or specialty license plates; amending s. 322.21, F.S.; providing an exemption from driver license fees to members of the Florida National Guard and their spouses; amending s. 394.47891, F.S.; providing that the chief judge of a judicial circuit has the exclusive authority to determine whether veterans may participate in the veterans treatment court of that circuit; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 15.0465, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

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15.0465 Official state flagship.—The S.S. American Victory,  
a 455-foot historic steamship built in 1944 ~~schooner Western~~  
~~Union, a 130-foot historic sailing vessel of the tall ship~~  
~~class, built in Key West and first launched in 1939~~, is  
designated the official state flagship.

Section 2. Section 295.124, Florida Statutes, is amended to  
read:

295.124 State approving agency for veterans' education and  
training.—The Department of Veterans' Affairs shall act as the  
state approving agency for purposes of veterans' education and  
training, in accordance with 38 U.S.C. s. 3671 ~~38 U.S.C. s. 1771~~  
and the applicable annual contract between the state and the  
Federal Government.

Section 3. Paragraph (d) of subsection (3), paragraph (a)  
of subsection (4), and paragraph (c) of subsection (8) of  
section 295.21, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

295.21 Florida Is For Veterans, Inc.—

(3) DUTIES.—The corporation shall:

(d) Implement the Veterans Florida Opportunity Employment  
~~and Training Services~~ Program established by s. 295.22.

(4) GOVERNANCE.—

(a) The corporation shall be governed by a 12-member ~~an 11-~~  
~~member~~ board of directors. The Governor, the President of the  
Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall  
each appoint three voting members to the board. The appointments  
made by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House  
of Representatives may not be from the body over which he or she  
presides. In making appointments, the Governor, the President of  
the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives

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88 shall ~~must~~ consider representation by active or retired military  
89 personnel and their spouses, representing a range of ages and  
90 persons with expertise in business, education, marketing, and  
91 information management. Additionally, the President of the  
92 Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives shall  
93 each appoint one member from the body over which he or she  
94 presides to serve on the board as ex officio, nonvoting members,  
95 and the Governor shall appoint one member who is a secretary, or  
96 his or her designee, with experience in economic or workforce  
97 development from an executive agency, as an ex officio,  
98 nonvoting member.

99 (8) ANNUAL REPORT.—The corporation shall submit an annual  
100 progress report and work plan by December 1 to the Governor, the  
101 President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of  
102 Representatives. The report must include:

103 (c) Status of the Veterans Florida Opportunity Employment  
104 ~~and Training Services~~ Program administered under s. 295.22.

105 Section 4. Section 295.22, Florida Statutes, is amended to  
106 read:

107 295.22 Veterans Florida Opportunity Employment and Training  
108 ~~Services~~ Program.—

109 (1) LEGISLATIVE FINDINGS AND INTENT.—The Legislature finds  
110 that the state has a compelling interest in ensuring that each  
111 veteran or his or her spouse who is a resident of this state  
112 finds employment that meets his or her professional goals and  
113 receives the training or education necessary to meet those  
114 goals. The Legislature also finds that connecting dedicated,  
115 well-trained veterans with businesses that need a dedicated,  
116 well-trained workforce is of paramount importance. The

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Legislature recognizes that veterans or their spouses may not currently have the skills to meet the workforce needs of Florida employers and may require assistance in obtaining additional workforce training or in transitioning their skills to meet the demands of the marketplace. It is the intent of the Legislature that the Veterans Florida Opportunity Employment and Training Services Program coordinate and meet the needs of veterans and their spouses and the business community to enhance the economy of this state.

(2) DEFINITIONS.—For the purposes of this section, the term:

(a) "Secondary industry business" is a business that the state has an additional interest in supporting and for which veterans and their spouses may have directly transferable skills. Such businesses are in the fields of health care, agriculture, commercial construction, education, law enforcement, and public service.

(b) "Servicemember" means any person serving as a member of the United States Armed Forces on active duty or state active duty and all members of the Florida National Guard and United States Reserve Forces.

(c) "Target industry business" is a business as defined in s. 288.005.

(d) "Target market" means servicemembers of the United States Armed Forces who have 24 months or less until discharge, veterans with 36 months or less since discharge, and members of the Florida National Guard or reserves. The term includes spouses of such individuals, and surviving spouses of such individuals who have not remarried.

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146 (3) CREATION.—The Veterans Florida Opportunity Employment  
147 ~~and Training Services~~ Program is created within the Department  
148 of Veterans' Affairs to assist in connecting servicemembers,  
149 veterans, or their spouses who are in the target market with  
150 businesses seeking to hire dedicated, well-trained workers and  
151 with opportunities for entrepreneurship education, training, and  
152 resources. The purpose of the program is to meet the workforce  
153 demands of businesses in this state by facilitating access to  
154 training and education in high-demand fields for such  
155 individuals and to inspire the growth and development of  
156 veteran-owned small businesses.

157 (4) ADMINISTRATION.—Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., shall  
158 administer the Veterans Florida Opportunity Employment and  
159 ~~Training Services~~ Program and perform all of the following  
160 functions:

161 (a) Conduct marketing and recruiting efforts directed at  
162 individuals within the target market who reside in or have an  
163 interest in relocating to this state and who are seeking  
164 employment. Marketing must include information related to how  
165 military experience can be valuable to a target industry or  
166 secondary industry business. Such efforts may include attending  
167 job fairs and events; hosting events for servicemembers,  
168 veterans, and their spouses or the business community; and using  
169 digital and social media and direct mail campaigns. The  
170 corporation shall also include such marketing as part of its  
171 main marketing campaign.

172 (b) Assist individuals in the target market who reside in  
173 or relocate to this state and who are seeking employment with  
174 target industry or secondary industry businesses. The

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175 corporation shall offer skills assessments to such individuals  
176 and assist them in establishing employment goals and applying  
177 for and achieving gainful employment.

178 1. Assessment may include skill match information, skill  
179 gap analysis, résumé creation, translation of military skills  
180 into civilian workforce skills, and translation of military  
181 achievements and experience into generally understood civilian  
182 workforce skills.

183 2. Assistance may include providing the servicemember,  
184 veteran, or his or her spouse with information on current  
185 workforce demand by industry or geographic region, creating  
186 employment goals, and aiding or teaching general knowledge  
187 related to completing applications.

188 3. Assessment and assistance may be in person or by  
189 electronic means, as determined by the corporation to be most  
190 efficient and best meet the needs of veterans or their spouses.

191 (c) Assist Florida target industry and secondary industry  
192 businesses in recruiting and hiring individuals in the target  
193 market. The corporation shall provide services to Florida  
194 businesses to meet their hiring needs by connecting businesses  
195 with suitable applicants for employment. Suitable applicants  
196 include veterans or veterans' spouses who have appropriate job  
197 skills or may need additional training to meet the specific  
198 needs of a business. The corporation shall also provide  
199 information about the state and federal benefits of hiring  
200 veterans.

201 (d) Create a grant program to provide funding to assist  
202 individuals in the target market in meeting the workforce-skill  
203 needs of target industry and secondary industry businesses

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seeking to hire, promote, or generally improve specialized skills of veterans, establish criteria for approval of requests for funding, and maximize the use of funding for this program. Grant funds may be used only in the absence of available veteran-specific federally funded programs. Grants may fund specialized training specific to a particular business.

1. The program may prioritize grant funds to be used to provide a certificate, a license, or nondegree training from the Master Credentials List pursuant to s. 445.004(4)(h); any federally created certifications or licenses; and any skills-based industry certifications or licenses deemed relevant or necessary by the corporation. Funds may be allocated only upon a review that includes, but is not limited to, documentation of accreditation and licensure.

2. Grant reimbursements ~~Costs and expenditures~~ are limited to \$5,000 ~~\$8,000~~ per eligible trainee per fiscal year. Qualified businesses must cover the entire cost for all of the training provided before receiving reimbursement from the corporation ~~equal to 50 percent of the cost to train a veteran who is a permanent, full-time employee.~~ Training costs for a trainee in a fiscal year must be equal to or greater than \$5,000. Eligible costs and expenditures include, but are not limited to:

- a. Tuition and fees.
- b. Books and classroom materials.
- c. Rental fees for facilities.

3. Before funds are allocated for a request pursuant to this section, the corporation shall prepare a grant agreement between the business requesting funds and the corporation. Such agreement must include, but need not be limited to:



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a. Identification of the personnel necessary to conduct the instructional program, instructional program description, and any vendors used to conduct the instructional program.

b. Identification of the ~~estimated~~ duration of the instructional program.

c. Identification of all direct, training-related costs.

d. Identification of special program requirements that are not otherwise addressed in the agreement.

e. Permission to access aggregate information specific to the wages and performance of participants upon the completion of instruction for evaluation purposes. The agreement must specify that any evaluation published subsequent to the instruction may not identify the employer or any individual participant.

4. A business may receive a grant under any state program and a grant under this section for the same veteran trainee.

5. Notwithstanding subparagraph 2., grant funds may be used as educational stipends for individuals in the target market while training at any location of the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences within this state. The corporation and the University of Florida shall enter into an agreement before any grant funds are expended, and the corporation shall determine the amount and structure of any educational stipend. Such stipend may be used only for such training for a period of no less than 4 months and no more than 6 months, in the absence of veteran-specific federally funded programs.

(e) Contract with one or more entities to administer an entrepreneur initiative program for individuals in the target market in this state which connects business leaders in the

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state with such individuals seeking to become entrepreneurs.

1. The corporation shall award each contract in accordance with the competitive bidding requirements in s. 287.057 to one or more public or private entities that:

a. Demonstrate the ability to implement the program and the commitment of resources, including financial resources, to such programs.

b. Have a demonstrated experience working with veteran entrepreneurs.

c. As determined by the corporation, have been recognized for their performance in assisting entrepreneurs to launch successful businesses in this state.

2. Each contract must include performance metrics, including a focus on employment and business creation. The entity may also work with a university or college offering related programs to refer individuals in the target market or to provide services. The entrepreneur initiative program may include activities and assistance such as peer-to-peer learning sessions, mentoring, technical assistance, business roundtables, networking opportunities, support of student organizations, speaker series, or other tools within a virtual environment.

(f) Administer a SkillBridge initiative for target industry and secondary industry businesses in this state and for eligible individuals in the target market who reside in, or who wish to reside in, this state. In administering the initiative, the corporation shall:

1. Establish and maintain, as applicable, its certification for the SkillBridge initiative or any other similar workforce training and transition programs established by the United

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States Department of Defense;

2. Educate businesses, business associations, and eligible individuals in the target market on the SkillBridge initiative and its benefits, and educate military command and personnel within the state on the opportunities available to eligible individuals in the target market;

3. Assist businesses in obtaining approval for skilled workforce training curricula under the SkillBridge initiative, including, but not limited to, apprenticeships, internships, or fellowships; and

4. Match eligible individuals in the target market with training opportunities offered by the corporation or participating businesses, with the intent of having them achieve gainful employment in this state upon completion of their SkillBridge training.

(5) COLLABORATION.—

(a) The corporation may assist state agencies and entities with recruiting veteran talent into their workforces.

(b) The corporation is encouraged to, and may collaborate with state agencies and other entities in efforts to, maximize access to and provide information on one website that, if possible, includes hyperlinks to the websites of and contact information, if available, for state agencies and other entities that maintain benefits, services, training, education, and other resources that are available to veterans and their spouses.

(c) The corporation may collaborate with other state agencies and entities for outreach, information exchange, marketing, and referrals regarding programs and initiatives that include, but are not limited to, the program created by this

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section and those within any of the following:

1. The Department of Veterans' Affairs:

a. Access to benefits and assistance programs.

b. Hope Navigators Program.

2. The Department of Commerce:

a. The Disabled Veteran Outreach Program and local veteran employment representatives.

b. CareerSource Florida, Inc., and local workforce boards employment and recruitment services.

c. The Quick-Response Training Program.

d. Efforts of the Florida Defense Support Task Force created under s. 288.987, the Florida Small Business Development Center Network, and the direct support organization established in s. 288.012(6).

3. The Department of Business and Professional Regulation, reciprocity and the availability of certain license and fee waivers.

4. The Department of Education:

a. CAPE industry certifications under s. 1008.44.

b. Information related to earning postsecondary credit at public postsecondary educational institutions for college-level training and education acquired in the military under s. 1004.096.

5. The Department of Health:

a. The Office of Veteran Licensure Services.

b. The Florida Veterans Application for Licensure Online Response expedited licensing.

6. The Office of Reimagining Education and Career Help.

Section 5. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$2.5

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million in recurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for the purposes of funding the Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., implementation and administration of the programs described in ss. 295.21(3)(d), 295.21(3)(f), and 295.22, Florida Statutes.

Section 6. Section 295.25, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

295.25 Veterans exempt from certain filing fees.—The Department of State may not charge veterans who reside in this state the applicable fees for filing articles of organization, articles of incorporation, a certificate of limited partnership, or a partnership registration statement, or for the designation of a registered agent, if applicable, as provided in s. 605.0213, s. 607.0122, s. 617.0122, s. 620.1109, or s. 620.81055. A veteran may apply for this exemption only once.

Section 7. Subsections (1) and (3), paragraph (a) of subsection (4), and subsection (6) of section 320.084, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

320.084 Free motor vehicle license plate to certain disabled veterans.—

(1) One free disabled veteran ~~“DV”~~ motor vehicle license number plate must ~~shall~~ be issued by the department for use on any motor vehicle owned or leased by any disabled veteran who has been a resident of this state continuously for the preceding 5 years or has established a domicile in this state as provided by s. 222.17(1), (2), or (3), and who has been honorably discharged from the United States Armed Forces, upon application, accompanied by proof that:

(a) A vehicle was initially acquired through financial

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378 assistance by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
379 or its predecessor specifically for the purchase of an  
380 automobile;

381 (b) The applicant has been determined by the United States  
382 Department of Veterans Affairs or its predecessor to have a  
383 service-connected 100-percent disability rating for  
384 compensation; or

385 (c) The applicant has been determined to have a service-  
386 connected disability rating of 100 percent and is in receipt of  
387 disability retirement pay from any branch of the United States  
388 Armed Services.

389 (3) The department shall, as it deems necessary, require  
390 each person to whom a motor vehicle license plate has been  
391 issued pursuant to subsection (1) to apply to the department for  
392 reissuance of his or her registration license plate. Upon  
393 receipt of the application and proof of the applicant's  
394 continued eligibility, the department shall issue a new  
395 permanent disabled veteran ~~"DV" numerical motor vehicle~~ license  
396 plate which must ~~shall~~ be of the colors red, white, and blue  
397 similar to the colors of the United States flag. The operation  
398 of a motor vehicle displaying a disabled veteran ~~"DV"~~ license  
399 plate from a previous issue period or a noncurrent validation  
400 sticker after the date specified by the department shall subject  
401 the owner if he or she is present, otherwise the operator, to  
402 the penalty provided in s. 318.18(2). Such permanent license  
403 plate must ~~shall~~ be removed upon sale of the vehicle, but may be  
404 transferred to another vehicle owned by such veteran in the  
405 manner prescribed by law. ~~The license number of each plate~~  
406 ~~issued under this section shall be identified by the letter~~

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407 ~~designation "DV."~~ Upon request of any such veteran, the  
408 department is authorized to issue a designation plate containing  
409 only the letters "DV," to be displayed on the front of the  
410 vehicle.

411 (4) (a) With the issuance of each new permanent disabled  
412 veteran ~~"DV" numerical~~ motor vehicle license plate, the  
413 department shall initially issue, without cost to the applicant,  
414 a validation sticker reflecting the owner's birth month and a  
415 serially numbered validation sticker reflecting the year of  
416 expiration. The initial sticker reflecting the year of  
417 expiration may not exceed 27 months.

418 (6) (a) A disabled veteran who meets the requirements of  
419 subsection (1) may be issued, in lieu of the disabled veteran  
420 ~~"DV"~~ license plate, a military license plate for which he or she  
421 is eligible or a specialty license plate embossed with the  
422 initials "DV" in the top left-hand corner. A disabled veteran  
423 electing a military license plate or specialty license plate  
424 under this subsection must pay all applicable fees related to  
425 such license plate, except for fees otherwise waived under  
426 subsections (1) and (4).

427 (b) A military license plate or specialty license plate  
428 elected under this subsection:

429 1. Does not provide the protections or rights afforded by  
430 ss. ~~316.1955, 316.1964, 320.0848,~~ 526.141, and 553.5041.

431 2. Is not eligible for the international symbol of  
432 accessibility as described in s. 320.0842.

433 Section 8. Subsection (7) of section 322.21, Florida  
434 Statutes, is amended to read:

435 322.21 License fees; procedure for handling and collecting

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436 fees.—

437       (7) (a) Any veteran honorably discharged from the Armed  
438 Forces who has been issued a valid identification card by the  
439 Department of Veterans' Affairs in accordance with s. 295.17,  
440 has been determined by the United States Department of Veterans  
441 Affairs or its predecessor to have a 100-percent total and  
442 permanent service-connected disability rating for compensation,  
443 or has been determined to have a service-connected total and  
444 permanent disability rating of 100 percent, is in receipt of  
445 disability retirement pay from any branch of the United States  
446 Armed Services, and who is qualified to obtain a driver license  
447 under this chapter is exempt from all fees required by this  
448 section.

449       (b) A member of the Florida National Guard who has been  
450 issued a valid identification card by the Department of Military  
451 Affairs and his or her spouse are exempt from all fees required  
452 by this section.

453       Section 9. Paragraph (d) of subsection (3) of section  
454 394.47891, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

455       394.47891 Veterans treatment court programs.—

456       (3) AUTHORIZATION.—

457       (d) The chief judge ~~and state attorney~~ of the judicial  
458 circuit that creates and administers a veterans treatment court  
459 program has ~~have~~ the exclusive authority to determine whether  
460 veterans who have been dishonorably discharged may participate  
461 in the veterans treatment court program of ~~within~~ the circuit.

462       Section 10. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.