

HOUSE BILL NO. 641

INTRODUCED BY B. TSCHIDA

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A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT PROVIDING FOR A STATE GRANT FOR A RAVALLI COUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICER PILOT PROGRAM; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE."

WHEREAS, the state funds 23 veterans' service officers (VSOs) in 10 regional offices in Montana under the Board of Veterans' Affairs; and

WHEREAS, additional VSOs are needed to meet the needs of Montana's more than 99,000 veterans spread across more than 147,000 square miles; and

WHEREAS, state law under section 10-2-115, MCA, allows counties to establish county-funded VSOs; and

WHEREAS, Ravalli County is the only county in Montana that has established a county veterans' service office and community-based collaboration, which is funded by a special voter-approved mill levy to provide proactive and comprehensive services to veterans and their families; and

WHEREAS, a 2-year pilot program will provide data and outcome information to demonstrate whether a state and county partnership will succeed in providing needed community-based veteran services in a cost-effective manner that may be duplicated in other counties to benefit more of Montana's veterans.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

NEW SECTION. Section 1. County veterans' service office pilot program -- grant -- conditions and reporting. (1) There is a Ravalli county veterans' service office pilot program. The board of veterans' affairs established in 2-15-1205 shall administer a grant for the pilot program from funding appropriated by the legislature for the purposes of this section. All of the money appropriated for the grant must be awarded to the pilot program by October 1, 2017, subject to the provisions of this section.

(2) To receive the grant, Ravalli county shall:

(a) ensure there is a physical office at an accessible location where veterans and their family members may visit in person;



- 1 (b) provide for at least three full-time-equivalent veterans' service officers;
- 2 (c) ensure that each county veterans' service officer meets the qualifications and requirements of
3 10-2-115;
- 4 (d) provide sufficient work space, supplies, software, and equipment, including telephones and
5 computers, to reasonably permit the staff to perform their duties;
- 6 (e) continue to fund the pilot program through a 1 mill levy designated for the veterans' service office;
- 7 (f) build partnerships with other community entities to address veterans' needs as they arise;
- 8 (g) provide regular reports on the pilot program to the board and the state administration and veterans'
9 affairs interim committee based on the criteria listed in subsection (3); and
- 10 (h) ensure that all of the grant money received pursuant to this section is spent in support of veterans
11 and their family members.
- 12 (3) The data and information to be provided to the board and the state administration and veterans'
13 affairs interim committee shall encompass the following:
- 14 (a) a needs assessment of veterans and their family members, including surviving spouses and
15 dependents;
- 16 (b) benefit claims data and information, including but not necessarily limited to:
- 17 (i) the number of claim forms submitted through the county veterans' service office to the U.S.
18 department of veterans affairs;
- 19 (ii) the number of new veteran claims filed through the office;
- 20 (iii) the number of completed claims filed through the office;
- 21 (iv) the number of claims for which the U.S. department of veterans affairs returned a decision and the
22 decisions made on the claims;
- 23 (v) the financial impact of the decisions made on the claims; and
- 24 (vi) the number of powers of attorney that appoint the Ravalli county veterans' service office to represent
25 claimants; and
- 26 (c) local community service information including but not limited to:
- 27 (i) the names of collaborating organizations;
- 28 (ii) the services provided by each collaborating organization;
- 29 (iii) the number of veterans and family members referred to each collaborating organization; and
- 30 (iv) the number of veterans and family members actively receiving services from the collaborating

1 organizations.

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3 NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Appropriation.** There is appropriated from the general fund to the
4 department of military affairs \$180,000 for the biennium beginning July 1, 2017, for the purposes of [section 1].

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6 NEW SECTION. **Section 3. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2017.

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8 NEW SECTION. **Section 4. Termination.** [This act] terminates June 30, 2019.

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