
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1239 Session of
2023

INTRODUCED BY WEBSTER, PIELLI, McNEILL, KINSEY, MADDEN, SANCHEZ,
GUENST, HILL-EVANS, DELLOSO, CERRATO, HOHENSTEIN AND SCOTT,
MAY 24, 2023

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND INDUSTRY, MAY 24, 2023

AN ACT

1 Establishing the Veterans Entering the Sustainability Sector
2 Program and the Veterans Entering the Sustainability Sector
3 Fund; and imposing duties on the Department of Agriculture,
4 the Department of Community and Economic Development, the
5 Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the
6 Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of
7 Military and Veterans Affairs.

8 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
9 hereby enacts as follows:

10 Section 1. Short title.

11 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Veterans
12 Entering the Sustainability Sector (VETSS) Program Act.

13 Section 2. Definitions.

14 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall
15 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
16 context clearly indicates otherwise:

17 "Apprenticeship training." Workforce training that, upon
18 satisfactory completion, results in the issuance of a registered
19 apprentice certificate recognized by the department and that
20 involves any of the following vocations, without limitation:

- 1 (1) Electrician.
- 2 (2) Construction craft laborer.
- 3 (3) Machinist.
- 4 (4) Sheet metal worker.
- 5 (5) Carpenter.
- 6 (6) Maintenance mechanic.
- 7 (7) Welder.
- 8 (8) Plumber.
- 9 (9) Pipe fitter.
- 10 (10) Automotive technician.
- 11 (11) Industrial manufacturing technician.
- 12 (12) Material coordinator.

13 "Department." The Department of Community and Economic
14 Development of the Commonwealth.

15 "Eligible employer." An employer that:

- 16 (1) Operates in the sustainability sector.
- 17 (2) Devotes the majority of its financial resources to
18 the development and operation of renewable energy as part of
19 its business activities.
- 20 (3) Hires a veteran with apprenticeship training.

21 "Environmental concerns." Includes any of the following that
22 may adversely affect this Commonwealth and the residents of this
23 Commonwealth:

- 24 (1) Climate change.
- 25 (2) The loss of biodiversity.
- 26 (3) The loss of ecosystem services.
- 27 (4) Land degradation.
- 28 (5) Air pollution.
- 29 (6) Water pollution.
- 30 (7) Minimal renewable energy sources.

1 "Fund." The Veterans Entering the Sustainability Sector Fund
2 established under section 8.

3 "Participating departments." The Department of Agriculture,
4 the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the
5 Department of Environmental Protection and the Department of
6 Military and Veterans Affairs.

7 "Program." The Veterans Entering the Sustainability Sector
8 Program established under section 3.

9 "Renewable energy." As follows:

10 (1) Energy that comes from a source that:

11 (i) Is natural.

12 (ii) Is self-replenishing.

13 (iii) Cannot be exhausted.

14 (iv) Generally has a low-carbon or zero-carbon
15 footprint.

16 (2) The term includes:

17 (i) Wind power.

18 (ii) Solar power.

19 (iii) Bioenergy and organic matter burned as fuel.

20 (iv) Hydroelectric power, including tidal energy.

21 "Sustainability sector." Industries that address the impact
22 of environmental concerns on the economy, society and the
23 health, safety and general welfare of the public.

24 "Veteran." As defined in 51 Pa.C.S. § 7101.2 (relating to
25 definitions).

26 "VETSS grant." A Veterans Entering the Sustainability Sector
27 grant awarded under the program.

28 Section 3. Establishment of program.

29 The Veterans Entering the Sustainability Sector Program is
30 established within the department.

1 Section 4. Purposes of program.

2 The purposes of the program are, through a partnership with
3 the participating departments, to:

4 (1) Provide veterans with apprenticeship training and
5 the opportunity to enter the workforce in the sustainability
6 sector.

7 (2) Prioritize the hiring of veterans with
8 apprenticeship training by any of the participating
9 departments to address environmental concerns.

10 (3) Provide VETSS grants to employers in the
11 sustainability sector that hire veterans with apprenticeship
12 training.

13 Section 5. Workforce training.

14 In consultation and coordination with the participating
15 departments and with other organizations or business entities
16 that provide or have the capacity to provide apprentice
17 training, the department shall oversee the development and
18 implementation of apprenticeship training for the purpose of
19 awarding VETSS grants.

20 Section 6. Grant applications.

21 (a) Availability of grant.--An eligible employer may apply
22 for a VETSS grant.

23 (b) Public notice.--The department shall provide the
24 following on the publicly accessible Internet website of the
25 department:

26 (1) Information regarding the availability and award of
27 VETSS grants.

28 (2) A form developed for eligible employers to use to
29 apply for a VETSS grant.

30 (c) Contents of application.--To qualify for a VETSS grant,

1 an eligible employer must complete a grant application form and
2 provide the following information to the department:

3 (1) The name, address and contact information of the
4 eligible employer that seeks the VETSS grant.

5 (2) The name of the individual hired by the eligible
6 employer, along with verification that the individual:

7 (i) Is a veteran.

8 (ii) Has satisfactorily completed, or is expected to
9 satisfactorily complete, apprenticeship training.

10 (3) Verification that the applicant is an eligible
11 employer.

12 (4) The amount of the VETSS grant requested.

13 (5) Any other information that the department deems
14 necessary and appropriate.

15 (d) Application periods.--Beginning no later than 180 days
16 after the effective date of this subsection, the department
17 shall begin accepting and processing applications for VETSS
18 grants. For all subsequent years, the department shall establish
19 an application period during which applications for VETSS grants
20 are accepted.

21 Section 7. Award of VETSS grants.

22 (a) Review.--After review of the information provided in an
23 eligible employer's submitted application, the department shall
24 determine whether to award a VETSS grant to the eligible
25 employer and, if so, the amount of the grant awarded.

26 (b) Time periods.--

27 (1) The department shall approve or deny an application
28 under the program no later than 60 days after the receipt of
29 the completed application.

30 (2) Subject to paragraph (3), if the department fails to

1 approve or deny an application under the program within 60
2 days after the receipt of the application, the application
3 shall be deemed denied.

4 (3) To aid in the determination of whether to award a
5 VETSS grant, the department may require additional
6 information or verification following receipt of the
7 completed application. In such an instance, the time period
8 specified in this subsection shall commence upon receipt of
9 the additional information or verification.

10 (c) Notice.--

11 (1) The department shall provide written notice to an
12 eligible employer of the award or denial of the grant
13 requested in the eligible employer's application.

14 (2) Notice of the award of a VETSS grant shall include
15 the amount of the grant awarded and any conditions or
16 restrictions on the use of the grant.

17 (3) Notice of the denial of all or part of a VETSS grant
18 shall include the reasons for the full or partial denial.

19 (d) Contract.--Before the disbursement of a VETSS grant, the
20 eligible employer must enter into a contract with the department
21 in which the eligible employer agrees that the veteran who is
22 the employee of the eligible employer and whose hiring qualified
23 the eligible employer for a VETSS grant shall remain employed by
24 the eligible employer for at least two years following the
25 disbursement of the VETSS grant. The following apply:

26 (1) The contract shall be considered a contract with the
27 Commonwealth.

28 (2) The contract shall include the following terms:

29 (i) If the veteran does not remain employed with the
30 eligible employer for at least two years following

1 disbursement of the VETSS grant, the eligible employer
2 shall be in breach of the contract and subject to the
3 following penalties:

4 (A) If the veteran was so employed for less than
5 one year, the repayment of 100% of the VETSS grant.

6 (B) If the veteran was so employed for at least
7 one year but less than two years, the repayment of
8 50% of the VETSS grant.

9 (C) Reasonable costs and attorney fees of a
10 civil action regarding the breach of contract.

11 (ii) If, after receiving a VETSS grant and during
12 the two-year period described under subparagraph (i), an
13 employer ceases to meet the requirements under paragraphs
14 (1) and (2) of the definition of "eligible employer," the
15 employer shall be subject to repayment of the entire
16 amount of the VETSS grant.

17 (iii) The eligible employer shall permit the
18 department to determine compliance with the employment
19 requirement and all other terms of the contract.

20 (e) Limitations.--

21 (1) Subject to paragraph (2):

22 (i) VETSS grants shall be disbursed on a first-come,
23 first-served basis determined by the department and until
24 all money in the fund is exhausted.

25 (ii) The department shall determine the amount of
26 each VETSS grant based on the vocation of the veteran
27 hired by the eligible employer.

28 (2) The department may set a cap on the amount of a
29 VETSS grant.

30 (3) The department may set conditions or restrictions on

1 the use of a VETSS grant.

2 (f) Duty of department.--The department shall implement any
3 necessary policy or procedure to administer the program.

4 Section 8. Fund.

5 (a) Establishment.--The Veterans Entering the Sustainability
6 Sector Fund is established as a nonlapsing fund in the State
7 Treasury. Any money remaining in the fund, including interest,
8 at the end of each fiscal year shall not revert to the General
9 Fund but shall remain in the fund.

10 (b) Fund sources.--

11 (1) Funding for the program shall consist of
12 appropriations by the General Assembly.

13 (2) The department may solicit and accept alternative
14 funding for the program, including Federal money, grants,
15 donations, gifts and other payments from any source.

16 (3) Money for the program shall be deposited into the
17 fund.

18 (c) Appropriation.--All money deposited into the fund and
19 interest earned on the money in the fund are appropriated to the
20 department on a continuing basis to award grants under the
21 program.

22 Section 9. Reports.

23 (a) Submittal.--No later than the March 1 that is at least
24 one year after the effective date of this section and each March
25 1 thereafter, the department shall submit a report on the
26 program to the following:

27 (1) The Governor.

28 (2) The Secretary of Agriculture.

29 (3) The Secretary of Conservation and Natural Resources.

30 (4) The Secretary of Environmental Protection.

1 (5) The Secretary of Military and Veterans Affairs.

2 (6) The chairperson and minority chairperson of the
3 Appropriations Committee of the Senate.

4 (7) The chairperson and minority chairperson of the
5 Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives.

6 (8) The chairperson and minority chairperson of the
7 Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the
8 Senate.

9 (9) The chairperson and minority chairperson of the
10 Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee of the
11 House of Representatives.

12 (b) Contents.--Each annual report under this section shall
13 include the following:

14 (1) The number of applications received under the
15 program.

16 (2) The number of VETSS grants awarded.

17 (3) The total amount of VETSS grants awarded.

18 (4) The amount of each VETSS grant awarded by each
19 vocation that was the subject of the apprentice training.

20 (5) The number of VETSS grants denied, in whole or in
21 part, along with the reasons for the denial.

22 (6) A summary of any breaches of contract regarding the
23 VETSS grants.

24 (7) The involvement of the participating departments in
25 developing and implementing the apprentice training.

26 (8) The amount remaining in the fund.

27 (9) Any recommendations by the department or the
28 participating departments to improve the program.

29 (c) Posting.--Each annual report under this section shall be
30 posted on the publicly accessible Internet website of the

1 department.

2 Section 10. Effective date.

3 This act shall take effect in 60 days.