

COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICER COMPENSATION STUDY

A STUDY OF SENATE BILL 1336/HOUSE BILL 895



TENNESSEE ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

STAFF REPORT

JANUARY 2012

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Only reports clearly labeled as “Commission Reports” represent the official position of the Commission. Others are informational.

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Dr. Harry A. Green, Executive Director

January 2012

The Honorable Bob Ramsey, Chair
House State and Local Government Committee
301 6th Avenue North
207 War Memorial Building
Nashville, TN 37243


Dear Chairman Ramsey:

Transmitted herewith is a staff report on Senate Bill 1336 by Senator Yager/ (House Bill 895 (Winningham, Johnson C., Bell), which was referred by the Committee to TACIR for study in 2010. This bill would have required that the initial compensation of a county veterans service officer be no less than the average pay received by department heads of the general government of the jurisdiction. The staff report was received by the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations at its December 7, 2011 meeting and is hereby submitted for your consideration.

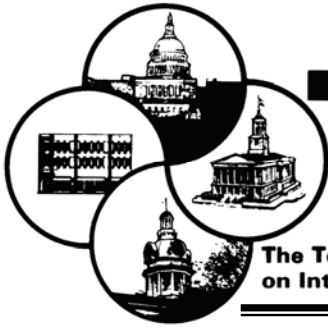
Sincerely,



Senator Mark Norris
Chairman



Harry A. Green, Ph.D.
Executive Director



TACIR

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MEMORANDUM

TO: TACIR Commission Members

FROM: Harry A. Green *Harry G*
Executive Director

DATE: December 8, 2011

SUBJECT: Staff Report to the General Assembly on SB 1336/HB 895

The Tennessee House of Representatives' State and Local Government Committee referred SB 1336/HB 895 to the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) for study. SB 1336/HB 895 amends the law which relates to the compensation of county veterans service officers (CVSOs). Specifically, this bill would amend the law to require that

- the initial compensation of a county veterans service officer be no less than the average pay received by department heads of the general government of the jurisdiction
- the initial compensation be increased annually by no less than the average cost-of-living adjustment provided to general government employees of the jurisdiction
- the county veterans service officers be entitled to the same benefits as the general government employees of the jurisdiction and
- the county veterans service officers be provided reasonable office space and administrative support.

Current county veterans service officers compensation would be no less than the amount provided above. Future county veterans service officers would also be entitled to the same benefits and support.

The staff presented its findings at the June meeting. They did not offer a specific recommendation on the main issue arising from SB 1336/HB 895 of whether the state should set a minimum salary for CVSOs. The staff offered some suggestions to consider.

The attached report is submitted for your consideration.

County Veterans Service Officer Compensation Study

A Study of Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895

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January 2012

Acknowledgments

TACIR staff would like to thank the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, the Tennessee County Veterans Service Officers Association, and the many county veterans service officers across the state that provided input for this study.



Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations. This document was produced as an Internet publication.

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Executive Summary

In 2010, Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 (S: Yager/H: Winningham, Johnson C., Bell) was sent to the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) for study by the Tennessee House of Representatives' State and Local Government Committee. This bill would have required that the initial compensation of a county veterans service officer (CVSO) be no less than the average pay received by department heads of the general government of the jurisdiction.

It is difficult to balance the interests of the counties with those of the CVSOs and the veterans they serve. This report does not offer a specific recommendation on the main issue arising from Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 of whether the state should set a minimum salary for CVSOs. The bill was not taken back up by the 106th General Assembly after being sent to TACIR for further study and it has not been reintroduced in the Legislature. Should a similar bill be drafted in the future, the TACIR staff offers these suggestions for consideration by the Legislature:

- Before initiating any change in pay, the Legislature should consider requiring that the CVSOs, in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, provide detailed information on the operations and workload in each county they serve.
- Any pay scale that is adopted should relate to the number of veterans in each county.

Purpose of the Report

The Tennessee House of Representatives' State and Local Government Committee referred Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 (S: Yager/H: Winningham, Johnson C., Bell) to TACIR for study in 2010. Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 would have amended the law that governs the compensation of CVSOs. Specifically, this bill would have required that

- the initial compensation of a county veterans service officer be no less than the average pay received by department heads of the general government of the jurisdiction,

It is difficult to balance the interests of the counties with those of the CVSOs and the veterans they serve.

- the initial compensation be increased annually by no less than the average cost-of-living adjustment provided to general government employees of the jurisdiction,
- the county veterans service officers be entitled to the same benefits as the general government employees of the jurisdiction, and
- the county veterans service officers be provided reasonable office space and administrative support.

These provisions would apply to current as well as future county veterans service officers.

Options to Consider

The CVSOs are dedicated, hard-working individuals, committed to helping the veterans of this state secure the benefits to which they are entitled. They work long hours. In some cases, they work full-time hours for part-time pay. They are willing to travel, meeting veterans in their homes, hospital rooms, or nursing homes in order to help them. Their actions help the community because the benefits that CVSOs help veterans obtain make their way back into the local economy. The CVSOs deserve to be adequately compensated for their services to veterans and the community.

Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 came at a time when counties were still affected by the economic downturn. This bill would require counties to raise the CVSO salaries at a time when counties have already instituted salary and hiring freezes and laid off county employees due to declining revenues. The law does not require counties to employ a CVSO. If this legislation had passed, it is possible some counties would have done away with CVSOs altogether, and that would not be in the best interests of the veterans or the community.

It is difficult to balance the interests of the counties with those of the CVSOs and the veterans they serve. This report does not offer a specific recommendation on the main issue arising from Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 of whether the state should set a minimum salary for CVSOs. The bill was not taken back up by the 106th General Assembly after being sent to TACIR for further study and it has not been reintroduced in the legislature. Should a similar

bill be drafted in the future, the staff offers these suggestions for consideration by the legislature:

- Before initiating any change in pay, the Legislature should consider requiring that the CVSOs, in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, to provide detailed information on the operations and workload in each county they serve.

The amount of work for a CVSO can vary from county to county. Before initiating any changes in pay, it might be beneficial to get in-depth, substantive information on the workload for each CVSO. The Tennessee County Veterans Service Officers Association, in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, could identify what workload measures would be appropriate. Potential measures could include: county veteran population, the percentage of veterans receiving benefits and the amounts received, the number of claims filed relative to the county population, and the number of veterans served by the CVSO. To the extent it is possible, this report should include detailed information on the workload of the state veterans benefit representatives and the post service officers. This information could help the Legislature assess the need for a new pay scale. It could also be used as a basis to determine which counties need additional assistance. On a statewide level, this information could be used to help ensure that veterans are receiving the benefits they deserve.

- Any pay scale that is adopted should relate to the number of veterans in each county.

As noted above, the amount of work required of a CVSO varies significantly from county to county. This difference could be reflected by having the pay scale relate to the number of veterans in each county. For example, Montgomery County has a relatively large number of veterans, so its CVSOs would have a much higher workload than those in most other counties. Another option would be by having the pay scale relate to the number of veterans actively being served by the CVSO in a county.

The amount of work for a CVSO can vary from county to county.

Background

Tennessee’s Veteran Population

In 2010, Tennessee’s veteran population was estimated to be 495,766.¹ This represents around 8 percent of the total state population of 6.3 million.² Table 1 outlines some of the characteristics of Tennessee’s veteran population.

Between 2000 and 2010 the number of veterans living in Tennessee was estimated to have decreased 11 percent, from 556,802 to 495,766.³ According to federal estimates, Tennessee’s veteran population will continue to decrease over the next decade by around 14 percent, from 495,766 to 424,309.⁴

	Number	Percentage
Gender¹		
Male	456,551	92%
Female	39,215	8%
Age²		
24 and below	5,740	1%
25-49	127,514	26%
50-74	268,458	54%
75+	94,055	19%
Ethnicity³		
White	409,937	83%
Black	71,650	14%
Hispanic	5,292	1%
American Indian	2,212	Less than 1%
Asian	1,528	Less than 1%
Other	5,147	1%
Period of Service⁴		
World War II	36,005	
Korean War	49,532	
Vietnam War	175,140	
Gulf War	126,339	
Peacetime	128,390	

¹Table 1L: Veterans by State, Age Group, Period, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

²Ibid.

³Table 4L: Veterans by State, Race/Ethnicity, Age Group, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

⁴Veterans who served in more than one war are counted in multiple categories. Table 2L: Veterans by State, Period, Age Group, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

¹Table 1L: Veterans by State, Age Group, Period, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

²U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census of Population.

³Table 4L: Veterans by State, Race/Ethnicity, Age Group, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

⁴Ibid.

Veterans Benefits

In his second inaugural speech, President Abraham Lincoln recognized the nation’s obligation “to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan.” Today Tennessee veterans may be eligible for a wide range of federal and state benefits.

Federal Benefits

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) administers a number of benefit programs. Table 2 lists the USDVA's major benefit programs.

Table 2: Federal Benefit Programs for Veterans Offered through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs	
Disability	Veterans are eligible for monthly compensation if they are at least 10 percent disabled as a result of military service.
Pensions	Veterans are eligible for a monthly pension if they are a wartime veteran with limited income, and are permanently and totally disabled or at least 65 years old.
Health Care	The USDVA provides a number of health care services.
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment	The USDVA helps veterans with service-connected disabilities find and keep suitable employment.
Education and Training	The USDVA provides benefits to veterans in an approved education or training program.
Home Loans	The USDVA provides guarantees for private home loans, refinancing at a lower interest rate and special grants for disabled veterans to adapt or acquire housing suitable for their needs.
Life Insurance	Veterans are eligible for various life insurance programs including low cost and renewable term life insurance.
Burial	The USDVA provides headstones and markers, Presidential Memorial Certificates, burial flags, reimbursement of burial expenses, and burial in a VA national cemetery.
Dependents and Survivors	Death gratuities are paid to certain survivors of veterans who died while on active duty or within 120 days of separation-related injuries or illness. Compensation is also payable to survivors of certain veterans who were receiving disability compensation at the time of their death.
Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, <i>Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents</i> (Washington D.C.: 2010).	

In addition to the USDVA, other federal agencies administer programs for veterans. The U.S. Small Business Administration, for example, provides business planning, counseling, and training. It also manages a range of special loans and guarantees to veterans who either own or are starting a small

business. Also, the U.S. Department of Agriculture provides loans and guarantees to veterans who want to buy, improve, or operate farms.

In FY 1999, the USDVA spent \$1.3 billion on Tennessee’s veterans.⁵ In FY 2009, it spent \$2.2 billion.⁶ This represents an 83% increase in federal spending for Tennessee’s veterans during that ten-year time period.

State Benefits

The state of Tennessee also provides benefits for veterans. Table 3 lists the major state veterans benefit programs.

Table 3: Major State Benefit Programs for Veterans*	
Property Tax Relief	Property tax relief is available for severely disabled veterans and/or surviving spouses.
County Motor Vehicle Privilege Tax Exemption	Veterans that are 100 percent disabled or who are a former POW are eligible for exemption from the county motor vehicle privilege tax.
Veterans Homes	Three veterans homes are available for veterans who qualify.
Employment Programs	The state provides veterans with preference in state employment and credit for military service in state employment.
Veteran Owned Businesses	Special consideration is given to Tennessee service-disabled veterans in the awarding and procuring of state contracts.
Tuition Fees	Dependents and/or spouses of certain veterans qualify for free tuition at state universities.
Burial	Tennessee provides burial for eligible veterans at three state veteran cemeteries.
Registration of Discharges	Registration of discharge is provided by the county registrar at no-fee.
Other	Other benefits include free license plates for certain veterans; parking privileges for free license plate holders; free hunting and fishing licenses for veterans with 30 percent or more war related disability, after a one-time payment of \$10.
*State Benefits for Eligible Veterans, Dependents, and/or Survivors, Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010 http://www.tn.gov/veteran/benefitsstate.html and Tennessee Code Annotated.	

⁵Geographic Distribution of VA Expenditures, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 29, 2010 http://www.va.gov/VETDATA/GDX/Geographical_data.asp.

⁶Ibid.

Benefit Claims Process

Veterans file claims in order to receive benefits, and this can be a long and complex process. Each benefit program has its own eligibility requirements; some programs have income limits, for example, while others may require wartime service. Also, veterans may also be eligible for benefits for only a limited period of time. For instance, veterans have 10 years from the date they were released from active duty to use their federal education and training benefits.

There are different claim forms for different benefit programs, so it may be challenging for a veteran to determine which claim form to use. These claim forms can be several pages long with many questions, which require attachment of additional information such as medical records, court records, separation papers, marriage certificates and divorce decrees, military records, and birth certificates. Due to the complexity of the claims process, most veterans file claims with the assistance of an accredited representative, such as a CVSO.

In Tennessee, a CVSO, a veterans benefit representative (VBR), or a post service officer (PSO) can assist veterans in filing for veterans benefits.⁷ A CVSO is a local government employee who can assist veterans in applying for benefits. A VBR is an employee of the state Department of Veteran Affairs who can also assist veterans in this process of filing for benefits.⁸ PSOs are members of local veterans service organizations, such as the American Legion, who are appointed by the veterans organizations to counsel veterans and their families and assist them in filing claims.⁹

The claims process usually begins when the veteran contacts a CVSO, PSO, or VBR and inquires about benefits. This person will interview the veteran and then identify and explain benefits for which the veteran may be eligible. The CVSO, PSO, or VBR will also help the veteran complete an application for benefits, including helping the veteran to compile any supporting documentation that

Due to the complexity of the claims process, most veterans file claims with the assistance of an accredited representative, such as a CVSO.

⁷Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, *Performance Audit of the Department of Veterans Affairs*, (Nashville: 2009), 7.

⁸Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs, *Annual Report 7/1/08-6/20/09*, (Nashville: 2009), 6.

⁹Ibid.

The General Assembly authorized the creation of CVSO positions with the passage of Chapter 38 of the Public Acts of 1945.

may be necessary. Claims processed by the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs Claims Division are assigned to a veterans claims specialist.¹⁰ The veterans claims specialist reviews the claim to make sure it is completed properly and has all necessary supporting documentation before it is submitted to the USDVA.¹¹ The specialist helps the veteran in any hearing that may be necessary during the prosecution of a claim and assists with any appeals.¹²

The completed claim form, along with any necessary evidence, is submitted to the USDVA.¹³ A rating specialist either approves the claim, approves the claim with modification, or denies the claim.¹⁴ If a claim is denied or modified, the claimant may file an appeal with the Board of Veterans' Appeals.¹⁵ If the claimant is not satisfied with the Board's decision, he or she may appeal the claim to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.¹⁶

Survey of County Veterans Service Officers

The General Assembly authorized the creation of CVSO positions with the passage of Chapter 38 of the Public Acts of 1945. This legislation empowered cities and counties to establish veterans service offices headed by CVSOs. The General Assembly declared that "it is of vital interest to each community in this State that such returned veterans be advised and assisted in obtaining all rights granted to them by legislation both Federal and State."

There are CVSOs currently serving veterans in 83 Tennessee counties.¹⁷ The law authorizes counties and cities to establish veterans service offices for the purpose of advising the veterans and their dependents and assisting them in obtaining all rights, privileges, immunities, and benefits to which they may be entitled.¹⁸

¹⁰ibid, 8.

¹¹ibid.

¹²ibid.

¹³Comptroller, *Performance Audit*, 8.

¹⁴ibid.

¹⁵ibid.

¹⁶ibid.

¹⁷This is based on the County Veterans Service Officer Directory on the Tennessee County Veterans Service Officer Association website, <http://tnvso.com/id16.html> accessed November 29, 2010.

¹⁸T.C.A. § 58-3-109.

The law does not require a county or city to create a veterans service office or employ a CVSO.

A CVSO is to be chosen by the governing body of the city or county creating the veterans' service office. All CVSOs must be honorably discharged veterans of the US armed forces and must complete training and be issued accreditation by the Department of Veterans Affairs within one year from the date of appointment. Any CVSO that does not complete the training shall be removed from office. No veteran or veteran dependent is charged a fee for services rendered by a CVSO.¹⁹

Counties and cities are authorized to appropriate such funds as necessary for the operation of service offices. The senior veteran service officer may receive compensation commensurate to that paid to heads of county government departments of comparable size in the county in which the officer is employed. This compensation may be prorated to reflect the number of hours that the officer actually worked during the pay period.²⁰

The CVSOs work in conjunction with veterans benefit representatives and post service officers to help veterans file claims and obtain benefits.

The bill sent to TACIR for study, Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895, would set a minimum level of compensation for a CVSO that is equal to the average pay received by department heads of the county that employs that CVSO. The CVSOs would be entitled to the same benefits as general county government employees. The bill would also require local government to provide the CVSOs with reasonable office space and administrative assistance. As a part of its study of the bill, TACIR staff surveyed the state's CVSOs in October and November 2010 to obtain information on their workloads and work environments. TACIR staff received 62 responses from CVSOs in 55 counties. (It should be noted that some counties employ more than one CVSO.)

The bill sent to TACIR for study, Senate Bill 1336/ House Bill 895, would set a minimum level of compensation for a CVSO that is equal to the average pay received by department heads of the county that employs that CVSO.

¹⁹T.C.A. § 58-3-111.

²⁰T.C.A. § 58-3-110.

Twelve respondents, all of whom were full-time CVSOs, reported working more than 40 hours per week.

Survey Results

Number of Full-Time and Part-Time County Veterans Service Officers

According to the survey responses, at least 26 counties have full-time CVSOs. Some counties, such as Montgomery and Bradley, employ more than one full-time CVSO. Of the full-time CVSOs responding to the survey, one indicated that he worked as a CVSO on a volunteer basis. Twenty-nine counties have part-time CVSOs, and one part-time CVSO reported that he worked on a volunteer basis. Marshall and Roane counties each have more than one part-time CVSO.

Hours Worked

Six respondents reported working less than 20 hours per week.²¹ All were part-time CVSOs. Twenty-three respondents reported working between 20-30 hours per week, but of these only four were full-time employees. Twenty survey respondents reported working 31-40 hours per week. Of these, 17 indicated that they were full-time employees, while three indicated they were part-time CVSOs. Twelve respondents, all of whom were full-time CVSOs, reported working more than 40 hours per week. One part-time CVSO also indicated that his work hours varied.

Case Loads

The survey asked the CVSOs to estimate their average case loads, and the staff received a wide range of responses to this question. Some respondents estimated the average number of cases they handled per day while others responded with their weekly, monthly, or annual case load. The responses ranged from a low of two to three cases per month to a high of 5,200 claims handled per year.

Working Outside the Office

Survey respondents from 52 counties reported helping veterans file claims outside the office. Only three CVSOs indicated in their survey responses that they did not help veterans file claims outside the office. Of these, one survey respondent indicated that he had helped veterans outside the office in the past, but health problems

²¹The staff received more than one survey response from some counties that employ more than one CVSO.

prevented him from doing so now. Survey respondents indicated they averaged anywhere from 1-50 hours per week assisting veterans outside the office. Some respondents indicated they traveled hundreds of miles per week in order to offer assistance to veterans outside the office.

Survey respondents from 53 counties indicated that they engaged in community outreach activities, such as attending meetings of veterans organizations and other community groups or networking with other human service providers in the community. Three survey respondents indicated that they did not engage in community outreach activities. CVSOs reported that they averaged anywhere from 1-20 hours per week engaged in community outreach activities.

Office Space

According to the survey responses, at least 50 counties in the state provide office space for their CVSOs. Five respondents stated that office space was not provided by the county. Of these, one survey respondent stated the American Legion provided office space.

Administrative Assistance

Survey respondents from 26 counties reported having administrative assistance. Of these, 10 reported having administrative assistance/ clerical help. Two reported having information technology (IT) assistance. One CVSO who responded to the survey said he would be hiring someone soon.

Survey respondents from 29 counties reported not having any administrative assistance. Of these, 17 indicated that they did not need administrative assistance, but 8 reported that they did have such a need. Two survey respondents did not answer the question, and one answered "sometimes."²² The staff received a response from each of the two CVSOs in Marshall County. One reported that

²²The staff received more than one survey response from some counties that employ more than one CVSO. In two cases, CVSOs in the same county provided conflicting answers. One CVSO from Marshall County stated he did not need administrative assistance and one reported a need for one sometimes. One CVSO from Roane County reported a need for assistance and one responded that he did not need assistance.

According to the survey responses, at least 50 counties in the state provide office space for their CVSOs.

In some states, the state government employs veterans service officers to assist veterans in filing for benefits.

he sometimes felt a need for administrative assistance, while the other reported that he did not.

Findings from the Survey

- The majority of CVSOs who responded to the survey reported working between 20-40 hours per week.
- Twelve CVSOs reported working over 40 hours per week.
- The vast majority of CVSOs spent time working outside the office, helping veterans file claims and/or engaging in community outreach activities such as attending veterans organization meetings.
- At least 50 counties provide office space for their CVSOs.
- Only 10 CVSOs reported a need, at least sometimes, for administrative assistance.

County Veterans Service Officers Compensation in Other States

In most states there are veterans service officers assisting veterans in filing for benefits at either the state or local government level. In twenty-three states²³ and the District of Columbia, the state government employs veterans service officers to assist veterans in filing claims. In Tennessee, the state and county governments both employ individuals who assist veterans in filing for benefits.

In Alaska, the veterans service organizations provide assistance to veterans filing claims, but the state may provide special grants to these organizations to help pay salaries and other expenses.²⁴ Neither the state nor local governments employ veterans service officers in Vermont. Wyoming is just beginning to establish a CVSO program; it currently has only two volunteer CVSOs.²⁵

²³Alabama, Arizona, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

²⁴*Alaska Stat.* § 26.10.040 and 10 *Alaska Admin. Code* 10.010.

²⁵See <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/wyoming-state-veterans-benefits> accessed November 29, 2010.

Twenty-four states,²⁶ including Tennessee, authorize local governments to appoint an officer. In seven of these states, state law requires each county to have an officer.²⁷ Seven states specifically authorize the counties to levy a special property tax to help fund the positions.²⁸

In some states, the state assists the local governments in funding the positions.

- Iowa law authorizes the state to allocate \$10,000 to each county veterans affairs office each year if there is money available.²⁹
- To provide for the veteran service officer's salary in South Dakota, the state government is authorized to allocate \$1.00 of state funds for each \$4.00 the county provides.³⁰
- The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs issues grants to counties for the improvement of services to veterans.³¹
- The Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs distributes money to counties to enhance and expand the services offered by the veterans service officers based on a distribution formula that takes into account the number of veterans in each county.³² In Arkansas, counties may apply for financial assistance from the state.³³ Arkansas can provide \$1.00 of state funds for every \$2.00 of county funds for the payment of the salary and expenses of veterans service officers.
- The coordinator of services for veterans positions in Nevada are funded by the county, but the state pays a portion of the office costs.³⁴

Some states assist local governments in funding CVSO positions.

²⁶Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, and Wisconsin.

²⁷Indiana, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin.

²⁸Florida, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Oregon.

²⁹Iowa Code § 35A.16.

³⁰S.D. Codified Laws § 33A-1-31.

³¹Wis. Stat. § 45.82.

³²ORS § 406.454.

³³A.C.A. § 20-81-106.

³⁴Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 244.406 and § 417.090.

- The county is responsible for the compensation and expenses of county veterans service officers in California, but the state distributes funds on a pro rata basis to those counties that have an officer.³⁵

Nebraska seems to be the only state that sets a minimum salary for county officers.³⁶ A full-time officer is required to be paid a minimum of \$5,500 to \$8,000 per year based on the county population.

³⁵Cal. Mil. & Vet. Code § 972.

³⁶R.R.S. Neb. § 23-1114.02.

Appendix A. Senate Bill 1336/House Bill 895 and Fiscal Note

HOUSE BILL 895
By Winningham

SENATE BILL 1336

By Yager

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 58,
Chapter 3, relative to Veterans' Service Officers.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. The general assembly finds that members of the armed services provide protection and defense of the United States of America by their service and sacrifice on behalf of all Americans, and, further, that veterans of the armed services deserve support and gratitude in every community. The general assembly further finds that Veterans' Service Officers (VSOs) provide an outstanding linkage for the veteran to the veterans administration and other federal and state agencies, as well as to opportunities in the community, resulting in positive benefits for the veteran and the host community. Accordingly, the general assembly finds that a person serving as a VSO in any county or city in this state should be given the status and compensation, including benefits, accorded department heads of general government in each respective jurisdiction.

SECTION 2. Tennessee Code Annotated, Section 58-3-109, is amended by adding the following as new, appropriately designated subsections:

(d) The initial compensation of a veterans' service officer shall be no less than the average pay received by department heads of the general government of the jurisdiction, which shall be annually increased by no less than the average cost-of-living adjustment provided to general government employees of the jurisdiction. The veterans' service officer shall be entitled to the same benefits as general government employees of the jurisdiction, and shall be provided reasonable office space and administrative support.

(e) The compensation of current veterans' service officers shall be no less

than the amount provided in subsection (d). Current veterans' service officers shall likewise be entitled to the same benefits and support as provided in subsection (d).

SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon becoming a law, the public welfare requiring it.

**TENNESSEE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
FISCAL REVIEW COMMITTEE**



FISCAL NOTE

HB 895 - SB 1336

March 20, 2009

SUMMARY OF BILL: Requires the compensation of a veteran's service officer (VSO) to be no less than the average pay received by department heads of the general government of the jurisdiction, to be annually increased by no less than the average cost-of-living increase provided to such general government employees. The VSO shall be entitled to the same benefits as general government employees and shall be provided reasonable office space and administrative support.

ESTIMATED FISCAL IMPACT:

Increase Local Expenditures – Exceeds \$980,000*

Assumptions:

- According to the Tennessee County Veteran's Service Officers Association, there are 85 Veteran's Service Officers statewide. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, approximately 73 of these VSOs serve on a part-time basis.
- Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 58-3-110, compensation may be prorated to reflect the number of hours that a VSO works during a specific pay period.
- VSO salaries range from approximately \$13,000 to approximately \$60,000, depending on the size of the county in which they serve.
- Based on the County Technical Assistance Service (CTAS) salary schedule for FY09-10, the average general government department head salary in Pickett County is \$53,583.60, resulting in a salary increase to the VSO of approximately \$40,000.
- Based on the CTAS salary schedule for FY09-10, the average general government department head salary in Shelby County is \$108,563.10, resulting in a salary increase to the VSO of approximately \$48,563.
- The increase in local government expenditures is dependent on the amount of increase to each VSO's salary to meet the requirements of the bill.

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- The impact to local government to raise the minimum compensation of the 22 full-time VSOs by an average salary of approximately \$40,000 per year could result in an increase in local government expenditures of approximately \$880,000.
- In addition, there could be an increase in local government expenditures to provide reasonable office space, if not currently provided, and administrative support for those VSOs who are now working in a one-man office. Such increase cannot be determined but could reasonably be estimated to exceed \$100,000 statewide.

*Article II, Section 24 of the Tennessee Constitution provides that: *no law of general application shall impose increased expenditure requirements on cities or counties unless the General Assembly shall provide that the state share in the cost.*

CERTIFICATION:

This is to duly certify that the information contained herein is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.



James W. White, Executive Director

/rct

HB 895 - SB 1336

Appendix B. County Veterans Service Officer Survey Form

County You Serve In _____

- 1) Are you employed as a full or part-time employee? _____
- 2) On average, how many hours per week do you estimate you work? _____
- 3) Does your local government provide you with office space? _____
- 4) What is your average caseload? _____
- 5) Do you have administrative support at your office such as clerical and/or IT staff? _____

- 6) If you do not have administrative support at your office, do you feel you need administrative support such as clerical and/or IT staff? _____
- 7) Do you work outside the office assisting veterans such as making house calls to veterans who cannot leave their home or visiting veterans in the hospital?

- 8) If you do work outside the office, how many hours per week would you estimate you spend on average working outside the office assisting veterans?

- 9) If you work outside the office, how many miles per week would you estimate on average you drive in order to assist veterans?

- 10) Do you engage in community outreach activities such as attending meetings of veterans organizations and other community groups or networking with other human service providers in the community? _____
- 11) If you do engage in community outreach activities, how many hours per week on average would you estimate you engage in such activities?

- 12) Are you financially reimbursed by the local government for travel expenses incurred when working outside the office? _____

Thank you for your assistance. If you wish to provide additional information or make comments on this issue, please use the space below. Attach additional pages as needed.

Appendix C. County Veterans Service Officer Salaries

The chart below lists the CVSO salaries which came from the 2010 county audit reports. In some cases, these reports did not list a salary for the CVSO. Some counties are listed as not having a CVSO or as having a vacant CVSO position based on information from the Tennessee County Veterans Service Officers Association website. There are two counties which list the CVSOs as being volunteers based on information from the CVSO survey which the TACIR staff conducted in October and November 2010.

County	County Veteran Service Officer Salary	County	County Veteran Service Officer Salary
Anderson	40,376	Hancock	3,852
Bedford	11,874	Hardeman	Salary not listed in audit report
Benton	9,083	Hardin	23,461
Bledsoe	3,000	Hawkins	23,139
Blount	64,288	Haywood	10,104
Bradley	Director 29,234 Assistant 25,200	Henderson	10,415
Campbell	39,504	Henry	29,085
Cannon	10,500	Hickman	Salary not listed in audit report
Carroll	21,687	Houston	1,719
Carter	21,739	Humphreys	7,899
Cheatham	Vacant CVSO position	Jackson	No CVSO
Chester	15,120	Jefferson	23,833
Claiborne	8,042	Johnson	9,192
Clay	Vacant CVSO position	Knox	Salary not listed in audit report
Cocke	27,701	Lake	No CVSO
Coffee	Salary not listed in audit report	Lauderdale	13,079
Crockett	10,843	Lawrence	26,971
Cumberland	20,412	Lewis	3,654
Davidson	Vacant CVSO position	Lincoln	1,440
Decatur	8,743	Loudon	6,162
DeKalb	4,905	Macon	18,931
Dickson	Vacant CVSO position	Madison	No CVSO
Dyer	Vacant CVSO position	Marion	5,928
Fayette	Volunteer CVSO	Marshall	14,136
Fentress	14,150	Maury	18,870
Franklin	15,108	McMinn	Salary not listed in audit report
Gibson	26,076	McNairy	9,750
Giles	13,000	Meigs	12,731
Grainger	6,375	Monroe	18,980
Greene	33,594	Montgomery	Supervisor 49,192 Assistants 108,137 (total assistant salaries)
Grundy	9,899	Moore	1,568
Hamblen	10,709	Morgan	Salary not listed in audit report
Hamilton	Vacant CVSO position	Obion	Salary not listed in audit report

County Veterans Service Officer Salaries (continued)

County	County Veteran Service Officer Salary	County	County Veteran Service Officer Salary
Overton	12,725	Sullivan	Salary not listed in audit report
Perry	2,309	Sumner	43,260
Pickett	15,522	Tipton	Salary not listed in audit report
Polk	8,040	Trousdale	Vacant CVSVO position
Putnam	23,550	Unicoi	Salary not listed in audit report
Rhea	36,621	Union	13,079
Roane	Salary not listed in audit report	Van Buren	No CVSVO
Robertson	Salary not listed in audit report	Warren	13,920
Rutherford	Volunteer CVSVO	Washington	No CVSVO
Scott	31,000	Wayne	3,513
Sequatchie	Salary not listed in audit report	Weakley	21,527
Sevier	34,722	White	24,341
Shelby	Salary not listed in audit report	Williamson	12,782
Smith	8,767	Wilson	32,807
Stewart	33,166		