

CHAPTER 92

(HB 225)

AN ACT relating to veterans.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:

SECTION 1. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 40 IS CREATED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

- (1)
 - (a) *The Kentucky Wounded or Disabled Veterans Program is hereby created in the Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs and shall be attached to the Office of the Commissioner for administrative purposes.*
 - (b) *The program shall assist wounded or disabled veterans who served in the United States Armed Forces and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable. The program shall:*
 1. *Ease the transition from active service for these wounded or disabled veterans; and*
 2. *Ensure that these wounded or disabled veterans receive the federal, state, and private benefits to which they are entitled as wounded or disabled veterans.*
 - (c) *The commissioner shall designate a Wounded or Disabled Veterans Coordinator for the Commonwealth.*
- (2) *The Kentucky Wounded or Disabled Veterans Program shall:*
 - (a) *Perform outreach to improve wounded or disabled veterans' awareness of eligibility for federal, state, and private wounded or disabled veterans' services and benefits;*
 - (b) *Assess the needs of wounded or disabled veterans with respect to benefits and services;*
 - (c) *Review programs, research projects, and other initiatives that are or may be:*
 1. *Designed to address or meet the needs of Kentucky's wounded or disabled veterans; or*
 2. *Unresponsive or insensitive to the needs of these wounded or disabled veterans;*
 - (d) *Recommend changes, revisions, and new initiatives to the commissioner to:*
 1. *Address deficiencies identified through the review established in paragraph (c) of this subsection; and*
 2. *Improve benefits and services; and*
 - (e) *Incorporate wounded or disabled veterans' issues in strategic planning concerning benefits and services.*
- (3) *The primary components of the program shall be:*
 - (a) *Advocacy and Public Awareness. The program shall advocate for wounded or disabled veterans and shall work to increase public awareness about the needs of wounded or disabled veterans. The program shall advocate legislation and policies on the local, state, and national levels to address these issues;*
 - (b) *Collaboration. The program shall collaborate with federal, state, and private agencies that provide services to wounded or disabled veterans;*
 - (c) *Research and Information Dissemination. The program shall monitor and research issues relating to wounded or disabled veterans and disseminate information and opportunities throughout its network;*
 - (d) *Education. The program, through conferences, seminars, and training workshops with federal, state, and private agencies, shall provide guidance and direction to wounded or disabled veterans applying for grants, benefits, or services;*
 - (e) *Honor and Recognition. The program shall promote events and activities that recognize and honor wounded or disabled veterans; and*
 - (f) *Facilities. The program, through grants and other sources of funding, shall provide facilities as appropriate in support of the program.*

- (4) *The Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs shall enter into data-sharing agreements with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense to obtain timely information with regard to the address and medical status of a Kentucky wounded or disabled veteran.*
- (5) *With the consent of a wounded or disabled veteran, the Wounded or Disabled Veterans Coordinator for the Commonwealth, or his or her designee, may obtain personal information concerning that veteran for the sole purpose of implementing the program. Under the provisions of KRS 61.878, the information shall not be subject to public disclosure.*
- (6) *The Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs shall promulgate administrative regulations to carry out the provisions of this section.*
- (7) *The program is authorized to accept and expend:*
 - (a) *Moneys that may be appropriated by the General Assembly; and*
 - (b) *Other moneys received from any other source, including donations and grants.*

Section 2. KRS 161.168 is amended to read as follows:

Notwithstanding any other statute to the contrary, a certified employee of a local board of education who is a member of a state National Guard or a Reserve component ordered to active military duty by the President of the United States shall be granted a leave of absence for this purpose and shall be considered to be rendering service to the state.

- (1) A local board of education that has granted military leave to a certified employee and has a commitment from the employee to return to work upon the conclusion of military leave may provide the employer's contribution toward the purchase of the state's medical insurance program during the period of military leave as long as the employee or spouse pays the additional cost of dependent coverage.
- (2) Upon the employee's return to work, the Commonwealth of Kentucky shall pay the member contribution and any accrued interest that is required to be paid under KRS 161.507(4)(b) in order for the member to receive retirement service credit for the period of active military duty. Under no circumstances shall a member be entitled to service credit under this paragraph that is in violation of the provisions of KRS 161.500. *The provision of this subsection shall be retroactive to January 1, 2003, for employees who have been deployed to active combat service.*
- (3) For each year of military service or each year of combined military and school service within a school year, the certified employee shall receive a year of service credit for purposes of the district's single salary schedule defined in KRS 157.320.
- (4) No provisions of this section shall be construed to provide disability benefits under KRS 161.611 or 161.663, survivorship benefits under KRS 161.520, life insurance benefits under KRS 161.555 or any other benefit available from the Kentucky Teachers' Retirement System as a result of active military service, or conditions or injuries resulting from active military service, except for the accrual of service credit which shall be acknowledged by the retirement system subject to the relevant conditions set forth in KRS 161.507.

Approved March 23, 2007.