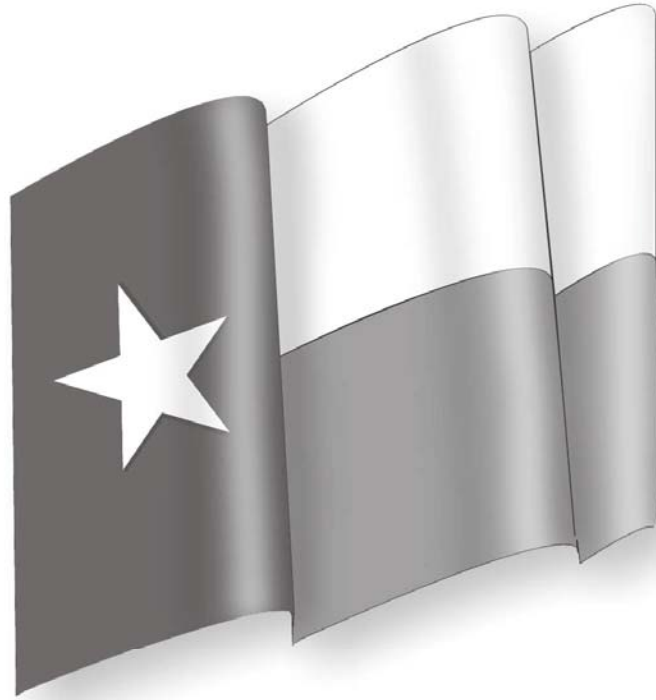


*Summary of Sunset  
Commission Recommendations*



**Texas Veterans Commission**

**February 2007**





# Texas Veterans Commission

## Agency at a Glance

The Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) supports Texas veterans and their families by providing assistance to veterans filing federal benefit claims and veterans seeking employment, and by approving educational institutions to receive federal Montgomery GI Bill funds. While TVC currently operates three programs, each of which contribute to the overall goal of providing accessible benefits to eligible Texas veterans, until the last two years, the Commission focused its efforts on providing assistance to veterans in filing federal benefit claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Created in 1927 as a division of the Adjutant General's Department, and becoming an independent agency in 1947, TVC received responsibility for the Veterans Employment Services program from the Texas Workforce Commission in 2005, and was designated by the Governor as the State Approving Agency for Veterans' Education, also in place of the Workforce Commission, in 2006.

Today, the Commission's main functions include:

- ◆ assisting veterans and their families in obtaining various state and federal benefits;
- ◆ administering benefit assistance training to veteran county service officers;
- ◆ providing employment and re-employment services to eligible veterans and their families;
- ◆ approving veterans' education and training institutions to receive federal funds; and
- ◆ promoting benefits provided by the state and federal governments to eligible veterans.



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*For additional information,  
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## Key Facts

- ◆ **Recent Program Transfers.** The transfer of the Veterans Employment Services program and the designation of the Commission as the State Approving Agency for Veterans' Education more than tripled the agency's number of staff and increased TVC's budget by more than \$11 million since the end of fiscal year 2005. To provide an accurate picture of the agency requires assessment of 2006 and even 2007 data.
- ◆ **Funding.** As a result of increased funding due to the Veterans Employment and Veterans' Education program transfers, in fiscal year 2007, the Commission expects to operate on a budget of about \$15.3 million, more than four times the agency's fiscal year 2006 operating budget.
- ◆ **Staffing.** TVC currently employs a staff of 311, with 291 located in 145 field offices and local workforce centers throughout the state. Before receiving the Veterans Employment and Veterans' Education programs, the Commission employed a staff of 97.
- ◆ **Claims Counseling.** The Veterans Commission provides information regarding the numerous state and federal benefits available to veterans as well as direct assistance

to veterans seeking to file federal benefit claims with the VA. In fiscal year 2006, the Commission assisted Texas veterans in filing 72,632 VA benefit claims and appealing 10,974 VA decisions.

- ◆ **Employment Services.** TVC helps eligible veterans access employment and training opportunities through the federally mandated Veterans Employment Services program. An annual federal grant of about \$10.4 million funds staff in local workforce centers throughout the state to assist veterans with finding jobs.
- ◆ **Veterans' Education.** The Commission approves education and training programs in Texas to authorize veterans' use of federal Montgomery GI Bill funds. Currently, a total of 837 programs are approved for veterans' education purposes.
- ◆ **County Service Officers.** The Veterans Commission provides technical training and general support to the State's network of approximately 250 county service officers who provide claims assistance to veterans at the local level.

### **Commission Members (5)**

John A. Brieden, III, Chair (Brenham)  
Karen S. Rankin, Vice Chair (San Antonio)  
Hector Farias, Secretary (Weslaco)  
James R. Adams (Dallas)  
Leonardo Barraza (El Paso)

### **Agency Head**

James Nier, Executive Director  
(512) 463-6564

### **Recommendations**

1. Continue the Texas Veterans Commission for four years and allow the Commission additional time to assume its new programs.
2. Improve the Commission's rulemaking process, enabling the Commission to respond to changes in its mission and the veterans it serves.
3. Provide the Commission with management tools needed to ensure the highest quality claims counseling and representation services for Texas' veterans.
4. Strengthen the Commission's relationship with county service officers to more effectively reach veterans at the local level.
5. Require the Commission to develop and implement a succession plan in anticipation of changes in the agency's workforce.
6. Require the Texas Veterans Commission and the Veterans' Land Board to coordinate a statewide approach to making Texas veterans aware of available benefits and services.

# Issue 1

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## **Texas Has a Continuing Need for the Texas Veterans Commission.**

### **Key Findings**

- ◆ The Texas Veterans Commission supports veterans and their families with accessing various state and federal benefits.
- ◆ The State has a clear and continuing interest in supporting Texans who have served their country.
- ◆ While the Commission generally accomplishes its traditional claims assistance mission, the agency faces challenges in operating its new programs.
- ◆ While the Veterans' Land Board also plays a key role in providing state benefits to veterans, consolidation is not a viable option.

At a time when the Texas veteran population is booming and veterans' issues are becoming more and more complex, the Texas Veterans Commission plays a key role in the State's commitment to honor those who have risked their lives to serve their country. Historically, the Commission's only function has been to provide veterans and their families with general benefit information and one-on-one assistance in pursuing federal benefit claims. However, TVC's new objectives include administering two benefit programs beyond this primary task, stretching the agency well beyond its original mission.

While Texas clearly has an interest in providing benefit assistance to veterans, the recent transfers of the veterans employment and education programs present significant challenges to the Commission and its ability to fulfill these new responsibilities. Because of this change, the agency needs additional time to assume its new functions and develop a track record for judging its ability to effectively administer these new programs.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Change in Statute**

##### **1.1 Continue the Texas Veterans Commission for four years.**

This recommendation would continue TVC as an independent state agency for four years, allowing the Commission additional time to assume its new functions – operating the Veterans Employment Services program and acting as the State Approving Agency for Veterans' Education – and providing the Legislature an opportunity to re-evaluate the Commission's progress and performance at that time. While the State should continue to assist Texas veterans and their families in obtaining the various benefits entitled to them by law, a more complete evaluation of whether the Veterans Commission has the organizational structure or institutional resources necessary to successfully provide employment and education services could not be made.

In the next Sunset review, TVC's overall performance would be assessed, as in any Sunset review, as well as the agency's ability to integrate the new programs into its overall mission. Giving the agency a Sunset date of September 1, 2011, would give TVC an opportunity to fully implement its assigned duties and develop a track record for adequately evaluating its performance.

In addition, the next Sunset review of the Texas Workforce Commission should be postponed from its current 2009 Sunset date, until 2011, to coincide with the TVC review to provide for a more comprehensive review of the comparable programs and the workforce system as a whole. This change would need to happen in a separate piece of legislation from that continuing TVC.

### **Management Action**

#### **1.2 The Commission should explore ways to better integrate its new programs into the agency's overall mission.**

This recommendation directs the Commission to assess its two new programs and better incorporate these functions into the agency's overall mission of providing veterans with all benefits entitled to them by law. In doing so, TVC should consider ways to connect the employment and education programs with the claims assistance program, providing veterans with a direct referral system to each division in the agency. For example, TVC should pursue providing its veterans employment staff with access to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' database, allowing the agency's other front-line assistance staff the opportunity to provide veterans with claim information updates. TVC should also explore opportunities for the veterans employment and education program staff, all of whom are required to perform community outreach functions as part of their job description, to provide information regarding the comprehensive benefit package that is available to Texas veterans.

## *Issue 2*

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### ***Limited Rulemaking and Stakeholder Input Restricts the Commission's Ability to Respond to Changes in Its Mission and the Veterans It Serves.***

#### **Key Findings**

- ◆ The Commission seeks to serve the needs of Texas veterans at a time when the profile of both the veteran and the agency is changing.
- ◆ TVC lacks a formal means of gathering needed input from stakeholders and coordinating with other organizations serving veterans.
- ◆ The Commission has not used rulemaking to establish an adequate framework for its programs.

Since its inception, the Texas Veterans Commission's mission has been to support veterans and their families, advocating on their behalf to obtain veteran benefits to which they are entitled. While TVC still helps veterans with their benefit claims, it does so in a changed environment. The Commission is not the same agency it once was, having recently gained responsibility for veterans employment and education programs from the Texas Workforce Commission. In addition, the veterans that the agency works with have also changed due to the composition of the fighting force deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan.

TVC needs to adapt its operations to accommodate these changes, but will need to increase its rulemaking to accomplish this task. The Commission also lacks an effective structure to consider outside expertise and advice, instead relying on informal relationships that may not reflect the variety of opinions or number of issues facing veterans today.

## Recommendations

### Change in Statute

#### **2.1 Require the Commission to develop guidelines for early stakeholder involvement in its rulemaking and policy development processes.**

This recommendation would require the Commission to develop a process for providing stakeholders with the opportunity for a stronger role in the development of agency rules and policies. This process could include appointing advisory committees under the agency's delegated authority provided in the Administrative Procedure Act (APA). Allowing key stakeholder input would provide the Commission with needed expertise as it develops program policies and strategies to address critical veterans' issues. If the Commission chooses to appoint advisory committees, the Commission should adopt rules regarding these committees, in compliance with Government Code provisions for advisory committees, including:

- ◆ purpose, role, and goals of the committee;
- ◆ size and quorum requirements;
- ◆ qualifications of the members and selection criteria;
- ◆ appointment procedures;
- ◆ terms of service;
- ◆ training requirements;
- ◆ a needs assessment process to regularly evaluate the continuing need for the committee; and
- ◆ the requirement that the committee comply with the Open Meetings Act.

### Management Action

#### **2.2 The Commission should adopt rules to guide its programs.**

This recommendation directs the Commission to adopt rules under the APA to direct its programs, bringing TVC in line with other state agencies' standard procedures for adopting rules for their programs. Adoption and application of rules is especially important for the agency's new programs where TVC does not have the expertise in workforce and training-related matters already in place at the Texas Workforce Commission. The Veterans Commission should take full advantage of APA authority to gather advice from veterans, their families, and the general public on proposed rules.

## *Issue 3*

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### ***TVC Lacks Management Tools Needed to Ensure the Highest Quality Claims Counseling and Representation Services for Texas' Veterans.***

#### **Key Findings**

- ◆ As part of a network of representatives, TVC assists veterans with filing VA benefit claims.
- ◆ TVC's approach to providing claims assistance potentially results in wasted resources needed to help veterans most in need.

- ◆ The state of TVC's information technology prevents the agency from effectively sharing information and measuring its performance on claims assistance activities.

For nearly 80 years, TVC has provided benefit information and one-on-one assistance to veterans navigating the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' benefit claims process. However, the agency heavily relies on historical knowledge to administer its claims program and lacks basic policies to guide the assistance process. Without this guidance, TVC cannot ensure an effective, consistent approach is used by counselors statewide or that, as a result, its process to assist veterans does not have the unintended consequences of wasting resources dedicated to help veterans most in need. Finally, the agency is severely hampered by its lack of information technology, restricting both TVC's ability to shepherd specific cases through the system and its ability to see how well the system is working.

## Recommendations

### Change in Statute

#### **3.1 Require TVC to adopt procedures for providing claims assistance services to Texas veterans.**

This recommendation would require TVC to develop criteria, subject to the Commission's approval, to improve and streamline the claims assistance process. In developing standard procedures for helping veterans file claims, TVC should address, at a minimum, the following areas:

- ◆ criteria for assessing initial claims to ensure the claim is substantially complete and meets the basic eligibility requirements specified in federal law;
- ◆ a formal documented process for expediting claims based on hardship, including whether the veteran is in immediate need, is terminally ill, has a verifiable financial hardship, or has a disability that presents an undue burden;
- ◆ procedures for counseling veterans on the potential merits of claims, or the potential drawbacks of pursuing claims that could place a veteran's current level of benefits at risk;
- ◆ steps needed to ensure adequate documentation and development of a claim, or appeal, including early client involvement, collection of needed evidence and records, and analysis of further actions needed to support the claim;
- ◆ criteria for evaluating whether the VA's benefit decision contains sufficient cause for filing an appeal; and
- ◆ requirements for claims counselors to report to the VA claims that TVC has direct knowledge contain false or deceptive information.

Under this recommendation, TVC would consult with the VA when developing these rules to ensure that TVC staff are not improperly involved in adjudicating claims. TVC would also work with the VA to ensure that policies and procedures provide for resolving disputes at the lowest level of the VA's benefit decision process. Additionally, in assessing cases, TVC would better prioritize its efforts to help veterans with claims when appropriate, and provide them with information on alternative sources for obtaining claims assistance services when it is not.

TVC would also work with the VA to establish broad areas of cooperation between the agencies to help streamline, and more closely align, TVC's service delivery with the VA's own processes. These areas of cooperation with the VA would include, cooperating on expediting hardship cases and appeals;

identifying processes to update changes to veterans' cases and power of attorney designation; and identifying opportunities for the VA to provide TVC with needed data to assist with tracking the progress and outcomes of claims.

### **Management Action**

#### **3.2 TVC should assess its information technology needs for the claims assistance program and report to the Legislature on the costs and benefits of implementing software to support the program.**

Under this recommendation TVC would work with the Texas Department of Information Resources (DIR) to assess the requirements, costs, and benefits of a case management system. TVC should work with DIR to identify existing case management software which could meet TVC's needs with a minimum level of modifications. At a minimum, the software should allow claims counselors to enter critical information regarding each case and for this information to be shared between all of TVC's field and regional offices, and the agency's headquarters, including the call center which currently does not have access to information regarding the progress of benefit claims. The program should also allow the agency to access management reports that indicate case progression and identify outcomes from TVC's efforts.

Based on the results of these efforts, TVC should work through the legislative appropriations process to seek appropriate funding for the case management software system. In calculating a cost of the system, the agency should include efficiencies in processes, resulting in potential reductions in administrative staff who provide transcription services to claims counselors in the agency's two regional offices.

This recommendation would also enable TVC to evaluate the effectiveness of its claims assistance activities, and to generate more useful and accurate management data needed to evaluate the agency's performance. To that end, TVC should work with the Legislative Budget Board and the Governor's Office of Budget, Planning, and Policy to redefine agency performance measures that show outcomes rather than basic outputs.

## *Issue 4*

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### ***The State Does Not Effectively Use County Service Officers to Reach Veterans at the Local Level.***

#### **Key Findings**

- ◆ The State has established a system of local county service officers to better assist veterans and their family members in applying for benefits.
- ◆ TVC can improve services to veterans through the more strategic use of CSOs.
- ◆ Statute limits TVC's ability to quickly and efficiently train county service officers.
- ◆ TVC's training and technical assistance could be improved to help ensure that veterans receive the best quality claims assistance services at the local level.

County service officers (CSOs) play a valuable role in helping Texas veterans, especially those located in rural communities without immediate access to other support resources, to obtain all the benefits to which they are entitled. The Texas Veterans Commission is responsible for training and certifying county service officers to help ensure that veterans receive quality benefit assistance at the local level.

Although TVC does not have direct authority over CSOs, or the counties for which they work, taking advantage of its relationship with CSOs could help develop them as a resource to serve more effectively in the State's veterans assistance network. The Commission could also improve its training program to better serve the training needs of CSOs so that they may best assist veterans. Updating statute to allow TVC flexibility in how it administers training, and directing TVC to implement a standard training curriculum, would ensure that county service officers have the initial and ongoing support they need.

## Recommendations

### Change in Statute

#### **4.1 Require the Commission to adopt a strategic plan to further integrate county service officers into the State's veterans assistance network.**

This recommendation would require the Commission to develop and adopt a plan to more closely coordinate with CSOs, and the county officials who oversee them, to create a statewide approach to claims assistance services that can be updated as the veteran population changes and new needs arise. At a minimum, this strategic plan should address the following areas:

- ◆ stating the Commission's, CSOs', and counties' shared objectives in serving veterans;
- ◆ working with counties to recruit CSOs, and encouraging them to become VA-accredited;
- ◆ consulting with counties to determine the most effective locations for CSOs;
- ◆ defining TVC's responsibilities in overseeing claims and appeals prepared by CSOs;
- ◆ collecting information on CSO performance, and providing needed technical assistance;
- ◆ documenting CSO performance, including on-site visit reports, and providing that information to county judges or other local officials that supervise CSOs;
- ◆ incorporating CSOs into VA appeals hearings either to represent veterans or to appeal as witnesses;
- ◆ exploring opportunities for funding CSO travel to participate in VA appeals hearings; and
- ◆ regularly updating CSOs on changes in VA policies and procedures, and other information.

#### **4.2 Require the Commission to develop and adopt a standard training curriculum.**

Under this recommendation, TVC would be required to develop standard course materials and exams for CSO certification and accreditation, subject to the Commission's approval. The agency would maintain and regularly update its course materials, keeping them in a central location and providing easy accessibility to all field staff and CSOs via the Internet. When implementing this recommendation, TVC would consult with the VA to ensure training material is accurate, up-to-date, and meets the VA's requirements. TVC would also seek input from accredited county service officers, who work as an extension of TVC, to ensure that training topics cover veterans' issues emerging at the local level.

In addition, the Commission would be required to develop a training handbook containing practical instruction and case examples, to be posted on the Internet, and addressing, at a minimum, the following areas:

- ◆ general assistance techniques, including how to provide referrals for other services or to other agencies, and general benefit information;
- ◆ basic counseling approaches for helping veterans and their family members file benefit claims;
- ◆ basic information on VA processes and procedures, including how to accurately complete claim and appeals forms and how to support the claim;
- ◆ methods of collecting needed documentation and further developing claims and appeals;
- ◆ methods of documenting progress and updating veteran case information;
- ◆ ways to assist veterans in pursuing appeals, including offering case knowledge in appeal hearings; and
- ◆ methods of representing veterans during appeal hearings.

**4.3 Provide for the Commission to train county service officers by other means beyond training conferences.**

This recommendation would remove the statutory requirement for TVC to hold training conferences and require TVC to develop alternative ways of ensuring that CSOs meet initial and annual training requirements. Under this recommendation, TVC would not be precluded from conducting training conferences, though the following management action directs the Commission to reduce the number of these training conferences. This recommendation would give TVC greater flexibility to provide training through other means it determines appropriate, including Internet-based seminars, via videoconference, or in cooperation with training conducted by the VA. It would also allow TVC the flexibility to train and certify county service officers without requiring CSOs or its own claims counselors to attend a week-long training session.

**Management Action**

**4.4 TVC should reduce the number of training conferences it conducts.**

This recommendation directs the Commission to reduce the number of training conferences it holds every year, refocusing its training efforts to include alternative methods, as described in the recommendation above. The Commission could still hold a limited number of conferences to allow county service officers, VA staff, its own claims counselors, and other members of the veterans community a means to network.

By reducing the number of conferences it holds each year, TVC would have additional resources to allocate towards providing individualized, in-field technical assistance to CSOs and could redirect management resources currently used to plan and conduct conferences to further efforts to integrate CSOs into the State's efforts to serve veterans. Finally, reducing the number of training conferences would free significant state and county staff time currently spent attending conferences, which could be used to provide additional claims assistance services to veterans.

## Issue 5

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### **Anticipated Changes in the Commission's Workforce Could Leave the Commission Vulnerable to a Significant Loss of Institutional Knowledge Critical to Its Operations.**

#### **Key Findings**

- ◆ The Commission employs a specialized and aging workforce.
- ◆ The Commission is likely to experience a significant rise in staff turnover in the near future.
- ◆ The Commission lacks thorough documentation of staff policies and procedures.
- ◆ The Commission will experience a dramatic increase in demand for veterans services.
- ◆ The Commission lacks a formal plan to deal with impending retirements and workforce changes.

In the near future, the Texas Veterans Commission will likely experience a significant loss of institutional knowledge and expertise as many older and long-tenured employees retire. At the same time, the demand for veterans services will dramatically increase as new veterans return from Iraq and Afghanistan. Currently, the Commission is not well-positioned to deal with its impending workforce changes. As the Commission has historically relied on the institutional knowledge retained by its long-tenured staff, the agency lacks documentation of its policies and procedures for future reference and training purposes.

#### **Recommendations**

##### **Management Action**

##### **5.1 The Commission should develop and implement a succession plan to prepare for impending retirements and workforce changes.**

The Commission should develop a plan to prepare for both anticipated and unanticipated departures of key staff, including identifying positions critical to the agency's operations and establishing a comprehensive strategy for preparing new staff to assume these responsibilities. The Commission should identify positions at risk of becoming vacant in the near future and provide training and development opportunities to employees eligible to move into these positions to enable the seamless transfer of institutional knowledge and expertise to new staff members.

The Commission would also be able to further develop its career ladder. With the Commission's turnover rate expected to significantly rise, the Commission should implement this plan within two to four years, before anticipated retirement-eligibility dates of key staff.

##### **5.2 The Commission should formally document its duties in writing by updating its manuals and making them available to all employees electronically.**

This recommendation ensures that the Commission captures institutional knowledge and uses this information to update its employee manuals to reflect current job duties and procedures for all Commission programs. The Commission should record valuable knowledge and expertise before key staff leaves, providing an effective method to document current practices as well as to train new staff. The Commission should make these manuals available to all staff electronically, such as through a password protected area on the Commission's website, or through other electronic means, such

as compact discs, as a more accessible and cost-effective means of information disbursement. This would allow the agency to more easily update information without printing new manuals every time information changes.

**5.3 The Commission should evaluate its promotion and evaluation policies and revise them to include measures of job performance.**

The Commission should revise its promotion and evaluation policies for all positions, including claims counselors, to include measures of job performance. Including measures of job performance for these positions would change promotions to be based more on merit, and less on performing a standard checklist of activities, providing an incentive for employees to perform their job well and rewarding employees most deserving of advancement.

**5.4 The Commission should take advantage of the pool of returning veterans who are seeking employment services to fill Commission vacancies.**

This recommendation instructs the Commission to take advantage of its direct contact with unemployed veterans when seeking to fill its vacated positions, assisting veterans in finding gainful employment and filling the Commission's own human resource needs.

## *Issue 6*

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### ***Texas Lacks a Comprehensive Approach to Making Veterans Aware of Available Benefits and Services.***

#### **Key Findings**

- ◆ Texas offers many benefits and services to its large veteran population.
- ◆ TVC and VLB duplicate many outreach efforts to veterans, wasting state resources.
- ◆ Despite the agencies' efforts, many veterans remain unaware or confused about all available benefits.
- ◆ The agencies' separate approaches to outreach leave Texas veterans without full and clear information on the total benefits package available to them.

The State honors its veteran population by providing many benefits and services to veterans, and their dependents and survivors. The Texas Veterans Commission and the Veterans' Land Board (VLB) both provide some of these benefits and services. TVC, statutorily required to collect, coordinate, and disseminate veteran information for the State, does so in conjunction with other agencies, particularly VLB. While TVC and VLB do coordinate in some ways to reach Texas veterans, the agencies' information exists in silos, making communication from the State to veterans inconsistent and incomplete. Additionally, the agencies' duplicate many activities and do not present benefit and service information to veterans in a clear and comprehensive way.

## Recommendations

### Change in Statute

#### **6.1 Merge TVC's and VLB's communications efforts by requiring the agencies to operate one call center, to maintain and share databases of veteran contact information, and to pool some direct mail efforts.**

This recommendation would combine the agencies' separate communications centers, requiring the following:

- ◆ merging TVC's call center with VLB's, collectively answering calls from the toll-free hotline;
- ◆ providing for the agencies to jointly maintain, access, and continue to build the veteran contact databases; and
- ◆ combining both agencies' direct mail efforts targeting newly discharged veterans, promoting benefits seminars, and persons seeking general information on veterans' services.

This recommendation would relocate to VLB the TVC employees necessary to jointly operate the communications center, which includes answering calls, maintaining databases, and any combined direct mail efforts. These employees would still be employed by TVC, but would be supervised by VLB, as determined through the agencies' Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). As a part of this recommendation, the agencies would cross-train call center employees to be knowledgeable about the services both agencies provide. As TVC and VLB begin to work more collaboratively on veterans databases and mail-outs, the State will definitively know which veterans they reach and will be able to provide needed information to more of its large veteran population with the information that they need.

#### **6.2 Require TVC and VLB to cooperatively create one website and one comprehensive brochure that provides information about all available veterans' benefits and services.**

This recommendation would require TVC and VLB to provide comprehensive information on veteran benefits and services in easy-to-use formats, developing one website and brochure for that purpose. This recommendation would require a coordinated effort, creating one place for veterans to find information about available benefits and how to pursue them. This recommendation requires the agencies to designate an easily identifiable web address for veterans. The new brochure should also advertise the web address as the central information hub.

#### **6.3 Require the agencies to jointly plan and present a total benefits package to veterans at all benefits seminars and meetings.**

Under this recommendation, TVC and VLB and their respective field representatives should collaborate on all benefits seminars to ensure they communicate information to Texas veterans as a total benefits package. As a part of this recommendation, the agencies would coordinate their involvement in state-sponsored seminars as well as meetings hosted by other veteran advocacy organizations. All state-sponsored seminars should be jointly planned and presented by the agencies, with an emphasis on presenting total benefit information to veterans. The agencies would have the ability to create the format of such seminars to provide for the effective use of time and level of detail necessary to educate veterans on benefits.

**6.4 Require the agencies to modify their existing Memorandum of Understanding to specify the guidelines necessary to coordinate veterans' benefit awareness activities.**

This recommendation would require the agencies to use their existing MOU to set up guidelines and reimbursements for coordinated outreach activities required in the preceding recommendations. The MOU should address the implementation of a joint call center, shared databases, combined direct mail efforts, comprehensive website and brochures, and coordinated seminars. The MOU should include the agencies' specific responsibilities for the management and funding of any collocated employees, necessary cross-training of staff, other operating expenses, such as office space, printing, postage, website development and maintenance, and any other coordinated outreach activity. In amending the MOU, the agencies should take into consideration the appropriate use of authorized bond proceeds and federal funds to ensure that the agencies comply with all funding constraints. This recommendation requires the agencies to complete the revised MOU by March 1, 2008.

This approach would ensure that the agencies have an operational framework to clearly and fairly lay out each agency's duties in implementing the above recommendations. The recommendation would provide for the appropriate use of each agency's resources, while better serving Texas veterans.

The agencies should also use the MOU as a working document to continue to explore opportunities for agency coordination, updating it as this collective marketing approach expands. As the veteran population grows in Texas from more veterans coming home, and as available resources change, TVC and VLB should use the MOU as a mechanism to collaboratively help more veterans find and access benefits and services.

## *Fiscal Implication Summary*

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One recommendation regarding the Texas Veterans Commission could have a fiscal impact to the State, as discussed below.

*Issue 3* – Appropriating funds for a computer-based case management system would result in start-up costs of about \$100,000 and annual costs of approximately \$75,000. However, no additional staff would be needed to set up or maintain the system. While the Sunset Commission has recommended that the Legislature appropriate \$100,000 for fiscal year 2008 and an additional \$75,000 each fiscal year thereafter to cover the cost of maintaining the system, the specific amount would need to be determined through the appropriations process. Also, this recommendation would not be tied to the Veterans Commission Sunset bill.

