

MEMBERSHIP OF VETERANS TRUST FUND BOARD AND COUNTY VETERANS COMMITTEES

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Senate Bill 798 (reported without amendment)

Sponsor: Sen. John Moolenaar

House Committee: Government Operations

Senate Committee: Veterans, Military Affairs, and Homeland Security

Complete to 12-8-11

A SUMMARY OF SENATE BILL 798 AS REPORTED FROM HOUSE COMMITTEE

The bill would amend the Veterans Trust Fund Act to revise provisions dealing with (1) the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund board of trustees and (2) the board's establishment of veteran county committees for the administration of money allocated on the local level. The bill would take effect on January 1, 2012.

According to the website of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, the trustees of the Trust Fund administer a discretionary fund that provides temporary financial assistance to veterans for emergency purposes. The program, through county committees, dispenses grants to veterans and their families to relieve temporary, emergent financial crisis or hardship. The trustees represent the interests of the veterans' community in both an advisory and advocacy role. The members of the board are appointed by the governor to serve 3 year terms.

The current sections that describe the membership of these Trust Fund board and the county boards would be repealed and replaced with new sections, which are described below.

Trust Fund Board

The bill requires the following membership: one representative of the American Legion; one from the Veterans of Foreign Wars; one from the Disabled American Veterans; one from any other congressionally chartered veterans organization; and three independent members. The independent members could be members of veterans organizations but would not be representatives of those organizations.

The current membership is as follows: two representatives of the American Legion; two from the Veterans of Foreign Wars; one from the Disabled American Veterans; and one from the American veterans of World War II-Korea-Vietnam. The act also says that an organization composed exclusively of honorably discharged veterans with a membership of at least 7,500 and with at least 40 posts established in at least 25 counties is eligible for representation on the board. [According to the DMVA, the current board has seven members, representing the American Legion, VFW, DAV, the Vietnam Veterans of American, and AMVETS.]

The bill also requires a board member to be a veteran and to have demonstrated knowledge, skills, and experience in public service, business, or finance. As is now the case, members can be removed for misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance, but the bill specifies that missing three or more consecutive meetings is considered malfeasance and is grounds for removal. Vacancies would be filled using the same method as the original appointment, with the new member to represent the same organization as the member being replaced.

County Boards

The Trust Fund board is required to establish county committees for the administration and allocation of funds at the local level. Two or more counties can be combined if it would produce more efficient local administration. Veterans seeking assistance must apply to these county committees.

The bill would require the appointment of the following members: one representative from the American Legion; one from the VFW; one from the Disabled American Veterans; one from any other congressionally chartered veterans organization; and at least one independent member. (This member could be a member of a veterans organization but would not be a representative of that organization.)

The current membership of a county or district board is similar to that required in the bill: one representative of the American Legion; one from the VFW; one from the DAV; and one from veterans of World War II-Korea-Vietnam. If no more than two of those organizations function in a county or district, then the two existing organizations can jointly recommend the appointment of a third veteran. The Trust Fund board can also appoint a representative from a local veterans organization that has in its membership at least three percent of all veterans originally entering the service from that territory.

As with the Trust Fund board, a county or district committee member would have to be a veteran and have demonstrated knowledge, skills, and experience in public service, business, or finance. As is now the case, members can be removed for misfeasance, malfeasance, and nonfeasance, but the bill specifies that missing three or more consecutive meetings is considered malfeasance and is grounds for removal. Vacancies would be filled using the same method as the original appointment, with the new member to represent the same organization as the member being replaced.

MCL 35.603b and 606a.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bill would not appear to have any fiscal impact on the state or local governments.

POSITIONS:

A representative of the Commanders Group, which comprises all 11 chartered veterans organizations, testified in support, noting that the bill makes the board of the Veterans Trust Fund more broadly representative of all veterans in the state. (12-7-11)

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs indicated support for the bill. (12-7-11)

The Michigan Veterans Trust Fund indicated support for the bill. (12-7-11)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.