

March 26, 2009

**S 973. CREATE DEPT. OF MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS.** Filed 03/25/2009. *TO ESTABLISH THE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS AND TO MAKE CONFORMING AMENDMENTS TO THE GENERAL STATUTES.*

Amends GS Chapter 143B to add a new Article 5A, creating the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, effective October 1, 2009. Provides for the transfer of the Division of Veterans Affairs of the Department of Administration to the newly created Department. The purpose of the law is to assist current members of the military, veterans, their families, and dependents (hereinafter, persons served by the Act) in benefiting from the rights to which they are entitled under federal, state, and local laws.

Provides that the Department will be headed by a Secretary (who must be a veteran), assisted by an Assistant Secretary for Veterans Affairs. Secretary is to serve without salary, unless federal legislation requires otherwise. Gives Secretary the right to establish necessary field offices and facilities; to accept property, funds, service, or facilities from any source to aid in furtherance of the act; to enter into necessary contracts; and to make necessary rules and regulations required in order to carry out duties. Secretary is also authorized to contribute a maximum of \$2,000 on a matching basis for any fiscal year to each county for operation of a county service program for members of the military and veterans, and to require participating counties to account for use of funds.

Sets out Secretary's duties as follows: (1) to assist persons served by the Act in presenting, processing, proving, and establishing their rights and benefits under the law; (2) to aid members in active service and their dependents with problems arising out of their service; (3) to collect information about available facilities and services and to inform relevant agencies about (a) available education, training, and retraining facilities, (b) health, medical, rehabilitation, and housing services and facilities, (c) employment and reemployment services, and (d) the provisions of federal, state, and local laws affording benefits to persons served by the Act.

Provides that appropriations for the Department will be made from the General Fund, and authorizes Governor, with approval of Council of State, to allocate additional funds from the Contingency and Emergency Fund. Also authorizes the Governor to transfer to the Department funds, facilities, properties, and activities presently administered by the State for the benefit of veterans, except for activities of the NC State Employment Security Commission. Requires the Department of Administration to provide adequate quarters for the Department central office in Raleigh.

Provides that Department is entitled to obtain copies of state and local records without charge. Prohibits Department records from being disclosed for any reason except official purposes.

Makes numerous conforming changes to statutes to replace references to "Veterans' Affairs" with "Military and Veterans' Affairs."

**Intro. by Rand.**

GS 20, 47, 65, 66, 143B, 161, 165