



# TACIR

The Tennessee Advisory Commission  
on Intergovernmental Relations



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## ***MEMORANDUM***

**TO:** TACIR Commission Members

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

**DATE:** December 8, 2011

**SUBJECT:** County Veterans' Service Officer Study

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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. 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. Current county veterans' service officers would also be entitled to the same benefits and support.

The staff presented its findings at the June meeting. It did not offer a specific recommendation on SB 1336/HB 895.

The staff offered some points to consider:

- **Before initiating any change in pay scale, the Legislature should consider requiring the CVSOs in conjunction with Tennessee Department of Veterans 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 Officer. The Tennessee County Veterans Service Officers Association in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs should 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 counties' population; and veterans served per Officer. 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 could help the Legislature judge 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 numbers of veterans in each county.**

As noted above, the amount of work required of a CVSO varies significantly from county to county. One way to reflect this would be by having the pay scale relate to the number of veterans located in each county. For example, Montgomery County has a relatively large number of veterans so their workload would be much higher than most other counties.

A copy of the draft report is included in this tab. Copies of the report were sent to the Tennessee County Veterans Service Officers Association, the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and AMVETs along with a letter requesting feedback or comments on the report. The staff has not received any feedback or comments at this time.

Senator Tracy expressed interest in hearing from the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, Commissioner Many-Bears Grinder, on this issue. Commissioner Grinder is scheduled to speak before the Commission and share her views.

## County Veterans Service Officer Compensation Study

### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Tennessee House of Representatives' State and Local Government Committee referred SB 1336/HB 895 (S: Yager/H: Winningham, Johnson C., Bell) to the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) for study in 2010. SB 1336/HB 895 amends the law which relates to the compensation of county veterans service officers. 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,<sup>44</sup> 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.

### BACKGROUND

#### Tennessee's Veteran Population

In 2010, Tennessee's veteran population was estimated to be 495,766.<sup>1</sup> This represents around 8 percent of the total state population of 6.3 million.<sup>2</sup> 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 veterans.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Table 1L: Veterans by State, Age Group, Period, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census of Population.

<sup>3</sup> Table 4L: Veterans by State, Race/Ethnicity, Age Group, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Tennessee’s Veteran Population—2010**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender<sup>5</sup></b>		
Male	456,551	92%
Female	39,215	8%
<b>Age<sup>6</sup></b>		
24 and below	5,740	1%
25-49	127,514	26%
50-74	268,458	54%
75+	94,054	19%
<b>Ethnicity<sup>7</sup></b>		
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%
<b>Period of Service<sup>8</sup></b>		
World War II	36,005	
Korean War	49,532	
Vietnam War	175,140	
Gulf War	126,339	
Peacetime	128,390	

### 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.

<sup>5</sup> Table 1L: Veterans by State, Age Group, Period, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Table 4L: Veterans by State, Race/Ethnicity, Age Group, Gender, 2000-2036, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010, <http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

<sup>8</sup> Veterans 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://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/Demographics/Demographics.asp>.

## 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<sup>9</sup>**

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	It 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	It 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.
Dependants and Survivors	Compensation is payable to certain survivors of veterans who died on active duty, from service-related disabilities and survivors of certain veterans who are being paid 100 percent disability compensation at time of death.

Other federal agencies in addition to the USDVA administer programs for veterans. The U.S. Small Business Administration provides business planning, counseling, and training. It also manages a range of special loans and guarantees to veterans who own or are starting a small business. The U.S. Department of Agriculture provides loans and guarantees to veterans who want to buy, improve, or operate farms.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents* (Washington D.C.: 2010).

In FY 1999, the USDVA spent \$1.2 billion on Tennessee's veterans.<sup>10</sup> In FY 2009, it spent \$2.2 billion.<sup>11</sup> This represents an 83% increase in federal spending for Tennessee's veterans during that ten-year time period.

### State Benefits

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

**Table 3: Major State Benefit Programs for Veterans<sup>12</sup>**

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 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	Dependants 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 discharges is provided by the county registrar at no-fee.
Other	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 one-time fee of \$10.

<sup>10</sup> Geographic Expenditure of VA Expenditures, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, accessed November 29, 2010 [http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/GDX/Geographical\\_data.asp](http://www1.va.gov/VETDATA/GDX/Geographical_data.asp).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> State Benefits for Eligible Veterans, Dependents, and/or Survivors, Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs, accessed November 23, 2010 <http://www.state.tn.us/veteran/benefitsstate.htm> and Tennessee Code Annotated.

## Benefit Claims Process

Veterans file claims in order to receive benefits. This can be a long and complex process. Each benefit program has its own eligibility requirements. Some programs have income limits while others may require wartime service. Veterans may also be eligible for benefits for only a limited period of time. For example, 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. The claim forms can be several pages long with many questions that may require the 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 County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO).

In Tennessee, a CVSO, a veterans benefit representative (VBR) or a post service officer (PSO) can assist veterans in filing for veterans benefits.<sup>13</sup> 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 filing for benefits.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup>

The claims process usually begins when the veteran contacts a CVSO, PSO or a VBR and inquires about benefits. This person will interview the veteran and then identify and explain benefits which the veteran may be eligible for. The CVSO, PSO or VBR will also help the veteran complete an application for benefits including helping the veteran to compile any supporting documentation which may be necessary. Claims processed by the Tennessee Department of Veteran Affairs Claims Division are assigned to a veterans claims specialist.<sup>16</sup> The veterans claims specialist reviews a claim to make certain that it is completed properly and has all necessary supporting documentation before it is submitted to the USDVA.<sup>17</sup> The specialist helps the veteran in any hearing that may be necessary in the prosecution of a claim and assists with appeals.<sup>18</sup>

The completed claim form along with any necessary evidence is submitted to the USDVA.<sup>19</sup> A rating specialist either approves the claim, approves the claim with modification or denies the claim.<sup>20</sup> If a claim is denied or modified, the claimant may file

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<sup>13</sup> Tennessee Comptroller of the Treasury, *Performance Audit of the Department of Veterans Affairs*, (Nashville: 2009), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs, *Annual Report 7/1/08-6/20/09*, (Nashville: 2009), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Comptroller, *Performance Audit*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

an appeal with the Board of Veterans' Appeals.<sup>21</sup> If a claimant is not satisfied with the Board's decision, the claimant may appeal the claim to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.<sup>22</sup>

## COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS

The General Assembly authorized the creation of CVSO positions by 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 counties.<sup>23</sup> The law authorizes counties and cities to establish veterans service offices for the purpose of advising the veterans and their dependants and assisting them in obtaining of all rights, privileges, immunities and benefits to which they may be entitled under any law or private institutions or individuals.<sup>24</sup> 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. All CVSOs 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.<sup>25</sup>

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 the compensation 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 numbers of hours that the officer actually worked during the pay period.<sup>26</sup>

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

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> This 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.

<sup>24</sup> T.C.A. § 58-3-109.

<sup>25</sup> T.C.A. § 58-3-111.

<sup>26</sup> T.C.A. § 58-3-110.

## **SURVEY OF COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICERS**

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

### **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 counties, 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. 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.<sup>27</sup> All of these were part-time CVSOs. Twenty-three reported working between 20-30 hours per week. Of these 4 were full-time employees and 19 were part-time. Twenty survey respondents reported working 31-40 hours per week. Of these 17 indicated they were full-time employees while 3 indicated they were part-time CVSOs. Twelve respondents reported working more than 40 hours per week. They all indicated that they were full-time CVSOs. One part-time CVSO indicated that his work hours varied.

#### **Case Loads**

The survey asked the CVSOs to estimate their average case load. The staff received a range of responses to this question. Some respondents estimated the average number of cases they handled per day. Others responded with their weekly, monthly, or annual case load. The responses ranged from a low of 2-3 cases per month to a high of 5,200 claims handled per year.

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<sup>27</sup> The staff received more than one survey response from some counties which employ more than one CVSO.

## **Working Outside the Office**

Survey respondents from 52 counties reported helping veterans file claims outside the office. Only 3 CVSOs indicated in their survey responses that they did not help veterans file claims outside the office. Of these one survey respondent indicated that in the past he had helped veterans outside the office but health problems prevented him from doing so now. Survey respondents indicated they spent anywhere from 1-50 hours per week outside the office on average assisting veterans. Some respondents indicated they traveled hundreds of miles each week assisting 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 spent anywhere from 1 to 20 hours per week on average engaging 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 IT (information technology) 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. Eight reported a need for assistance. Two survey respondents did not answer the question and one answered sometimes.<sup>28</sup> The staff received a response from each of the two CVSOs in Marshall County. One CVSO reported that he sometimes felt there was a need for administrative assistance. The other CVSO reported that he did not think there was a need for administrative assistance.

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<sup>28</sup> The staff received more than one survey response from some counties which employ more than one CVSO. In two cases, CVSOs in the same county provided conflicting answers. One CVSO from Marshall County stated they 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 they did not need assistance.

## Findings from the Survey

- The majority of those CVSOs responding 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 spend 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 responding to the survey reported a need, at least sometimes, for administrative assistance.

## OTHER STATES

Most states provide some type of assistance to veterans in filing for benefits at either the state or local level. In twenty-three states<sup>29</sup> 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 in filing claims but the state provides special grants to these organizations to help pay salaries and other expenses.<sup>30</sup> Neither the state or local governments employ veterans service officers in Vermont. Wyoming is just beginning to establish a CVSO program. It currently has only two CVSOs who are volunteers.<sup>31</sup>

Twenty-four states<sup>32</sup> including Tennessee authorize local governments to appoint an officer. In seven of these states, state law actually requires each county to have an officer.<sup>33</sup> Seven states specifically authorize the counties to levy a special property tax to help fund the positions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Alabama, 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.

<sup>30</sup> Alaska Stat. § 26.10.040 and 10 Alaska Admin. Code 10.010.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.military.com/benefits/veteran-benefits/wyoming-state-veterans-benefits> accessed November 29, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Arkansas, 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.

<sup>33</sup> Indiana, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, and Wisconsin.

<sup>34</sup> Florida, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, and Oregon.

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.<sup>35</sup>
- In South Dakota, the state is authorized to provide assistance of \$1 of state funds for each \$4 of county funds to provide for the payment of the veterans service officer's salary.<sup>36</sup>
- The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs issues grants to counties for the improvement of services to veterans.<sup>37</sup>
- 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 which takes into account the number of veterans in each county.<sup>38</sup>
- In Arkansas, the counties may apply for financial assistance from the state.<sup>39</sup> Arkansas can provide \$1 of state funds for every \$2 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.<sup>40</sup>
- The county is responsible for the compensation and expenses of county veterans service officers in California but the state distributes state funds on a pro-rata basis to those counties who have an officer.<sup>41</sup>

Nebraska seems to be the only state that sets a minimum salary for county officers.<sup>42</sup> A full-time officer is required to be paid a minimum of \$5,500 to \$8,000 a year based on the county population.

## CONCLUSIONS

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 may work full-time hours for part-time pay. They are willing to travel to a veteran at their home, hospital, or nursing home in order to help them. The CVSOs' actions benefit the community since the veteran benefits—which the CVSOs help

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<sup>35</sup> Iowa Code § 35A.16.

<sup>36</sup> S.D. Codified Laws § 33-16-28.3.

<sup>37</sup> Wis. State § 45.82.

<sup>38</sup> ORS § 406.454.

<sup>39</sup> A.C.A. § 20-81-106.

<sup>40</sup> Nev. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 244.406 and § 417.090.

<sup>41</sup> Cal Mil & Vet Code § 972.

<sup>42</sup> R.R.S. Neb. § 23-1114.02.

veterans obtain—make their way back into the local economy. The CVSOs are individuals that deserve to be adequately compensated for their services to veterans and the community.

SB 1336/HB 895 came about at a time when counties are still affected by the economic downturn. This bill would require counties to raise the salary for a CVSO 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 passed, it is possible some counties would do away with CVSOs altogether which would not be in the best interests of the veterans.

It is difficult to balance the interests of counties with those of the CVSOs and the veterans they serve. **This report does not offer a specific recommendation on SB 1336/HB 895.** It instead offers some points to consider:

- **Before initiating any change in pay, the Legislature should consider requiring the CVSOs in conjunction with the Tennessee Department of Veterans 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 should 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 counties' 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 could help the Legislature judge 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. One way to reflect this would be by having the pay scale relate to the number of veterans located in each county. For example, Montgomery County has a relatively large number of veterans so their workload would be much higher than most other counties.

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.

**HB 895 - SB 1336**

- 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

**Appendix B**

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 case-load? \_\_\_\_\_
- 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

The chart below lists the CVSO salaries which came from the 2010 county audit reports. In some cases, the audit 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. This is based on information from the Tennessee County Veterans Service Officers Association website. There are two counties which list the CVSOs as being volunteers. This is based on information from the CVSO survey which the TACIR staff conducted in October and November 2010.

<b>County</b>	<b>County Veteran Service Officer Salary</b>
Anderson	40,376
Bedford	11,874
Benton	9,083
Bledsoe	3,000
Blount	64,288
Bradley	Director 29,234; Assistant 25,200
Campbell	39,504
Cannon	10,500
Carroll	21,687
Carter	21,739
Cheatham	Vacant CVSO position
Chester	15,120
Claiborne	8,042
Clay	Vacant CVSO position
Cocke	27,701
Coffee	Salary not listed in audit report
Crockett	10,843
Cumberland	20,412
Davidson	Vacant CVSO position
Decatur	8,743
DeKalb	4,905
Dickson	Vacant CVSO position
Dyer	Vacant CVSO position
Fayette	Volunteer CVSO
Fentress	14,150
Franklin	15,108
Gibson	26,076
Giles	13,000
Grainger	6,375
Greene	33,594

<b>County</b>	<b>County Veteran Service Officer Salary</b>
Grundy	9,899
Hamblen	10,709
Hamilton	Vacant CVSO position
Hancock	3,852
Hardeman	Salary not listed in audit report
Hardin	23,461
Hawkins	23,139
Haywood	10,104
Henderson	10,415
Henry	29,085
Hickman	Salary not listed in audit report
Houston	1,719
Humphreys	7,899
Jackson	No CVSO
Jefferson	23,833
Johnson	9,192
Knox	Salary not listed in audit report
Lake	No CVSO
Lauderdale	13,079
Lawrence	26,971
Lewis	3,654
Lincoln	1,440
Loudon	6,162
Macon	18,931
Madison	No CVSO
Marion	5,928
Marshall	14,136
Maury	18,870
McMinn	Salary not listed in audit report
McNairy	9,750
Meigs	12,731
Monroe	18,980
Montgomery	Supervisor 49,192; Assistants 108,137 (total assistant salaries)
Moore	1,568
Morgan	Salary not listed in audit report
Obion	Salary not listed in audit report
Overton	12,725
Perry	2,309
Pickett	15,522

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