



SENATE OF PENNSYLVANIA BILL SUMMARY

Senate Bill 227 Printer's No. 1033

Prime Sponsor: Senator Blake
Committee: Urban Affairs and Housing

SYNOPSIS:

An Act establishing the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program; and making appropriations.

SUMMARY:

Senate Bill 227 would allow the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) to work in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) to establish the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program. This legislation outlines the duties of both DMVA and PHFA, the conditions for enrollment, the financial assistance awarded, the cooperation between DMVA, PHFA, federal departments and local public housing authorities, as well as the appropriations necessary to establish and execute the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program.

Duties

Under Senate Bill 227 both DMVA and PHFA **shall** establish guidelines to assist with the implementation of this act. Furthermore, DMVA **shall** be required to implement a program to identify homeless veterans for purposes of enrolling them in the program and coordinate with PHFA to ensure that homeless veterans are provided the opportunity to receive assistance from the agency's housing ombudsman or financial assistance from the agency. PHFA **shall** be required to do all of the following:

- Establish a housing ombudsman or contract with a nonprofit organization to provide housing location, relocation and stabilization services to homeless veterans, including negotiating lease agreements with public agencies or private landlords on behalf of a homeless veteran.
- Provide or contract with a third party to provide credit counseling services to homeless veterans to resolve personal credit issues that may have resulted in a negative credit report.
- Award financial assistance to eligible homeless veterans determined to be in need of financial assistance to obtain housing.

Conditions

A veteran may enroll in the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program by filing an application with DMVA or PHFA. A veteran shall be eligible for enrollment if the veteran is homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless or if the veteran cannot obtain adequate housing without the assistance of DMVA and PHFA. The DMVA **may** require a veteran to engage in activities as conditions for participation in the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program, such as mental health counseling, substance abuse and co-occurring disorder treatment, health education, as well as self-help programs such as job placement and training, money management and credit counseling.

Financial Assistance

Under Senate Bill 227 PHFA may award a rental housing voucher to a veteran, payable to the lessor named in a leasing document executed between the veteran and a landlord. The rental housing voucher **shall** not exceed **\$1,000** per month for 12 months to cover housing costs, however, a veteran will be able to file for an extension with DMVA. DMVA **shall** be required to consider the veteran's employment status, personal finances and their compliance with the conditions of enrollment before awarding an extension.

Cooperation

DMVA and PHFA **may** cooperate with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or local public housing authorities to carry out the provisions of this act. At the discretion of DMVA and PHFA they **may** also coordinate the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program with an existing Federal program that provides funding for housing for homeless veterans, including the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program.

Appropriations

In order to establish and execute the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program:

- **\$12,500,000** shall be appropriated from the General Fund to PHFA for the period of **July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016**, for purposes of carrying out their responsibilities under this act, with no more than **\$500,000** of the funds being appropriated for administrative costs incurred by PHFA.
- **\$500,000** shall be appropriated from the General Fund to DMVA for the period of **July 1, 2015, to June 30, 2016**, for purposes of carrying out their responsibilities under this act.

Effective Date: This act shall take effect in 60 days.

BILL HISTORY:

Referred to the Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee on June 11, 2015

Prepared by: Ribic 11/4/2015