**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND SECTION 25‑11‑40 OF THE 1976 CODE, RELATING TO COUNTY VETERANS’ AFFAIRS OFFICERS, TO PROVIDE FOR THE FUNDING OF COUNTY VETERANS’ AFFAIRS OFFICES, TO PROVIDE FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS, AND TO PROVIDE THAT OFFICERS MUST COMPLETE A TRAINING AND BE ISSUED ACCREDITATION WITHIN NINETY DAYS AFTER APPOINTMENT; AND TO REPEAL SECTION 25-11-45 OF THE 1976 CODE, RELATING TO APPROPRIATIONS TO COUNTY TREASURER’S OFFICES TO MAINTAIN COUNTY VETERANS’ AFFAIRS OFFICES.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. A. Section 25‑11‑40 of the 1976 Code is amended to read:

“Section 25‑11‑40. (A) For the purpose of this section, ‘veteran’ means a person who served on active duty in the armed forces of the United States and who was honorably discharged or released from such service due to a service‑connected disability.

(B)(1) ~~Subject to the recommendation of a majority of the Senators representing the county and a majority of the House members representing the county, the secretary shall appoint a county veterans' affairs officer for each county in the State, whose term of office shall begin July first of each odd‑numbered year and shall continue for a term of two years and until a successor shall be appointed. Qualifications shall be determined by the county legislative delegation upon a majority vote of the Senators representing the county and a majority of the House members representing the county. A county veterans' affairs officer is an at‑will employee of the department, subject to removal for cause at any time by the secretary, a majority of the Senators representing the county, and a majority of the House members representing the county.~~ County veterans’ affairs officers are at-will employees of the State and funded with monies appropriated by the General Assembly for that purpose.

(2) County veterans’ affairs officers shall be appointed by the secretary and perform duties as established by the secretary. Their appointments will start on the first of July on each odd-numbered year and will last for two years. At the end of each appointment period, the secretary may elect to either extend the appointment period for an additional two‑year period or make another appointment for the position.

(3) Service to veterans will be rendered through the respective county veterans’ affairs offices as outlined and directed by the secretary.

(C) County veterans’ affairs office support staff are employees of the State, funded with monies appropriated by the General Assembly for that purpose.

(D) Operations and facilities for county veterans’ affairs offices are funded with monies appropriated by the General Assembly for that purpose.

(E) All county veterans' affairs officers must successfully complete a comprehensive course of training and be issued accreditation within ~~one year~~ ninety days following initial appointment~~, either~~ through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs ~~department or through an accredited national veterans' service organization~~. ~~A training council from the South Carolina Association of County Veterans' Affairs Officers, in conjunction with the department or through an accredited national veterans' service organization, shall develop the training criteria. Training and accreditation must be provided by the department or through an accredited national veterans' service organization.~~ All comprehensive courses of training and yearly recertification requirements will be established by the secretary and administered through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. A county veterans' affairs officer who does not complete the required training ~~and~~ or receives accreditation within the ~~first year~~ ninety days following appointment is ~~ineligible for reappointment by the county legislative delegation~~ subject to dismissal at the discretion of the secretary. Additionally, in order to maintain accreditation, refresher training is required yearly.

~~(D)~~ ~~In Dorchester County, appointments made pursuant to this section are governed by the provisions of Act 512 of 1996.~~”

B. Section 25‑11‑40(B), as amended by this act, takes effect July 1, 2021. Section 25‑11‑40(C), as amended by this act, takes effect July 1, 2022. Section 25‑11‑40(D), as amended by this act, takes effect July 1, 2023.

C. Notwithstanding the provisions contained in Section 25‑11‑45 to the contrary, beginning in:

(1) Fiscal Year 2020‑2021, and in each fiscal year thereafter, the General Assembly shall appropriate to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs those funds necessary to carry out the purposes contained in Section 25‑11‑40(B), as amended by this act;

(2) Fiscal Year 2021‑2022, and in each fiscal year thereafter, the General Assembly shall appropriate to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs those funds necessary to carry out the purposes contained in contained in Section 25‑11‑40(C), as amended by this act; and

(3) Fiscal Year 2022‑2023, and in each fiscal year thereafter, the General Assembly shall appropriate to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs those funds necessary to carry out the purposes contained in contained in Section 25‑11‑40(D), as amended by this act.

SECTION 2. Section 25-11-45 of the 1976 Code, relating to appropriations to County Treasurer’s Offices to maintain County Veterans’ Affairs Offices, is repealed July 1, 2023.

SECTION 3. Except as otherwise provided, this act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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