

Senate Bill 24-004
Legislation Resulting from the Veterans Services Performance Audit
Concerning The Administration of County Veterans Service Offices
Recommendations 5 (page 45) and 6 (page 56)

What Would This Bill Do?

This Bill would amend:

- Sections 28-5-705 and 28-5-707, C.R.S., to change the Division of Veterans Services' (Division's) duty to monitor county veterans service offices rather than to supervise them.
- Sections 28-5-705 and 28-5-801, C.R.S., to clarify that county veterans service offices share in the responsibility with the Division to "further prompt and efficient service to" veterans.
- Section 28-5-707, C.R.S., to change procedures for the Division's payment to counties for the performance of certain veterans services, by requiring payments to be based on hours worked by county veterans service officers (VSOs), as reported by the county in a time and manner to be prescribed by the Division, and requiring payments to be made to counties annually rather than semiannually.
- Section 28-5-801 C.R.S. et seq., to:
 - Clarify that counties can have more than one VSO, only one of whom is required to be a veteran.
 - Require county VSOs to be certified by the Division and accredited by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in order (1) to be eligible to serve as a claimant's representative in assisting the claimant with their claims for federal veterans benefits, and (2) for the county to receive financial support from the Division.

What Did the Audit Find?

The September 2022 performance audit of Veterans Services found:

- Variations in timely access to veterans services provided by state and county VSOs, resulting, in part, from the Division not having established a written, official, interpretation of the statutory directive to "further prompt and efficient service to all veterans in the state of Colorado on a uniform basis," or the respective duties of the Division and the counties in promoting such uniformity.
- The Division's method for distributing payments to counties for their performance of veterans services being made without consideration of the demand for veterans services in the county, resulting in significant differences in the effective hourly payment rates the counties received for the services they provided.
- The Division's payments to counties being made without consideration of whether the county's VSOs were accredited by the VA; accreditation allows the officer to submit claims directly to the VA without the involvement of the State, resulting in more efficient service for veterans.

The audit recommended that the Division establish a written interpretation of the statutory directive that the Division and the counties act to promote the provision of services to all veterans in the state on a uniform basis, seeking statutory clarification if needed. The audit also recommended that the Division ensure that it distributes county support appropriation funds to counties in a manner that aligns with the statutory intent to promote uniform access to services across the state, seeking statutory changes as needed.

Comments: The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs supports this Bill.