**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND SECTION 25‑11‑40, AS AMENDED, CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, RELATING TO THE APPOINTMENT, REMOVAL, TRAINING, AND ACCREDITATION OF COUNTY VETERANS’ AFFAIRS OFFICERS, SO AS TO PROVIDE, AMONG OTHER THINGS, THAT COUNTY VETERANS’ AFFAIRS OFFICERS ARE AT‑WILL EMPLOYEES OF THE STATE, AND TO REVISE THE MANNER BY WHICH COUNTY VETERANS’ AFFAIRS OFFICERS ARE APPOINTED AND ACCREDITED; AND TO REPEAL SECTION 25‑11‑45 RELATING TO COUNTY VETERANS AFFAIRS OFFICES.

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

SECTION 1. Section 25‑11‑40 of the 1976 Code, as last amended by Act 26 of 2019, is further 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) ~~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~~ (1) County veterans’ affairs officers are at‑will employees of the State and are funded with monies appropriated by the General Assembly for that purpose.

(2) County veterans’ affairs officers must be appointed by the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs, and they shall perform duties as established by the Secretary. Appointed terms for county veterans’ affairs officers must begin on July first of each odd‑numbered year and shall last for two years. At the end of each term, the Secretary may elect to reappoint a county veterans’ affairs officer for an additional two‑year term, or he may appoint another individual to the position.

(3) Veteran services must be rendered through the veterans’ affairs office located in the veteran’s county of residence as outlined and directed by the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs.

(C) ~~All county veterans’ affairs officers must successfully complete a comprehensive course of training and be issued accreditation within one year following initial appointment, either through the 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. A county veterans’ affairs officer who does not complete the required training and receives accreditation within the first year following appointment is ineligible for reappointment by the county legislative delegation. Additionally, in order to maintain accreditation, refresher training is required yearly~~ County veterans’ affairs office support staff are employees of the State and are funded with monies appropriated by the General Assembly for that purpose.

(D) ~~In Dorchester County, appointments made pursuant to this section are governed by the provisions of Act 512 of 1996~~ 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 ninety days following initial appointment through the Department of Veterans Affairs. All comprehensive courses of training and yearly recertification requirements will be established by the Secretary of Veterans’ Affairs and administered through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs. A county veterans’ affairs officer who does not complete the required training or receive accreditation within ninety days following his appointment is subject to dismissal at the discretion of the Secretary. Additionally, annual refresher training is required in order to maintain accreditation.”

SECTION 2. Section 25‑11‑45 of the 1976 Code is repealed.

SECTION 3. Section 25‑11‑40(B) takes effect July 1, 2021, Section 25‑11‑40(C) takes effect July 1, 2022, and Section 25‑11‑40(D) takes effect July 1, 2023. The remaining provisions of this act take effect upon approval by the Governor.

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