



AN ACT ALLOWING FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COUNTY AND MULTICOUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES; PROVIDING FOR A STATE GRANT PROGRAM FOR COUNTY VETERANS' SERVICE OFFICES; PROVIDING AN APPROPRIATION; AMENDING SECTION 10-2-115, MCA; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND A TERMINATION DATE.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:

**Section 1.** Section 10-2-115, MCA, is amended to read:

**"10-2-115. ~~County veterans' service officers~~ County and multicounty veterans' service offices.**

(1) A county may, with the advice of the board, provide for a county veterans' service officer office to assist veterans and their families in filing benefit claims. If a county provides for a veterans' service officer under this section, the officer must be trained, accredited, and supervised in accordance with the applicable provisions of 38 CFR 14.629. A county may fund the position as provided for in 15-10-425 or through other means provided by law.

(2) The governing body of two or more counties may enter into a memorandum of understanding to establish a multicounty veterans' service office that operates under the same guidelines as a single-county office.

(3) Veterans' service officers assigned to county veterans' service offices must be trained, accredited, and supervised in accordance with applicable provisions of 38 CFR 14.629.

(4) A county may fund its veterans' service office as provided for in 15-10-425 or through other means provided by law."

**Section 2. Funding county veterans' service offices -- grant -- conditions and reporting.** (1)(a) The board shall administer a grant program and award grants to county and multicounty veterans' service offices from funding appropriated by the legislature for the purposes of this section.

(b) The amount paid to each county or multicounty veterans' service office is calculated by multiplying the total annual appropriation for the grant program by the ratio of the number of veterans residing in a county

or counties serviced by a county or multicounty veterans' service office to the total number of veterans residing in all counties participating in the grant program and rounding to the nearest whole dollar amount. The number of veterans residing in a county is determined using the most recent data reported by the U.S. department of veterans affairs.

(c) The board shall ensure that all funds are distributed to eligible county or multicounty veterans' service offices.

(2) To receive a grant, a county or multicounty veterans' service office shall:

(a) have established county funding as provided for in 15-10-425 or through other means provided by law;

(b) have established a physical office at an accessible location where veterans and their family members may visit in person;

(c) provide for at least one veterans' service officer;

(d) ensure that each county veterans' service officer meets the qualifications and requirements of 10-2-115; and

(e) ensure that all of the grant money received pursuant to this section is spent in support of veterans and their family members and may not be used for any other purpose.

(3) If the requirements of subsection (2) are met, a grant must be awarded:

(a) to a county veterans' service office established before [the effective date of this act];

(b) to a new county veterans' service office during the biennium immediately following the date it was established; and

(c) each subsequent fiscal year a county veterans' service office continues to meet the requirements in subsection (2).

(4) The amount of grant money a county veterans' service office receives is in proportion to the number of veterans residing in the county or counties served by that office as specified in subsection (1)(b).

(5) A county veterans' service office that receives a grant shall report data and information to the department at the end of the fiscal year in which a grant was dispersed. Reported data and information shall encompass the following:

(a) disability benefit claims data and information, including but not limited to:

(i) the number of claim forms submitted by the county veterans' service office to the U.S. department of

veterans affairs; and

(ii) the number of notices of disagreement or appeals submitted through the county veterans' service office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs;

(b) the number of medical enrollments submitted by the county veterans' service office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs;

(c) the number of veterans' education enrollments submitted by the county veterans' office to the U.S. department of veterans affairs;

(d) the number of county and state burial benefits processed by the county veterans' service office; and

(e) a description of any other ancillary services provided to county veterans, such as transportation services, mental health services, homeless services, crisis intervention, and military records requests.

**Section 3. Appropriation.** (1) The following money is appropriated from the general fund to the department of military affairs for grants awarded to county and multicounty veterans' service offices as provided for in [section 2]:

Fiscal year 2020	\$30,000
Fiscal year 2021	\$30,000

(2) The legislature intends that the appropriation in fiscal year 2021 be considered as part of the ongoing base for the next legislative session.

**Section 4. Codification instruction.** [Section 2] is intended to be codified as an integral part of Title 10, chapter 2, part 1, and the provisions of Title 10, chapter 2, part 1, apply to [section 2].

**Section 5. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2019.

**Section 6. Termination.** [This act] terminates June 30, 2023.

- END -

I hereby certify that the within bill,  
HB 0172, originated in the House.

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Speaker of the House

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day  
of \_\_\_\_\_, 2019.

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Chief Clerk of the House

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President of the Senate

Signed this \_\_\_\_\_ day  
of \_\_\_\_\_, 2019.

HOUSE BILL NO. 172

INTRODUCED BY D. BEDEY, N. BALLANCE, J. ELLSWORTH, J. FULLER

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