

1 \*\*\*\* BILL NO. \*\*\*\*  
2 INTRODUCED BY \*\*\*\*  
3 BY REQUEST OF THE \*\*\*\*  
4

5 A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY  
6 AFFAIRS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT STAFF FOR VETERAN SERVICE OFFICERS EMPLOYED BY  
7 THE MONTANA VETERANS' AFFAIRS DIVISION; REQUIRING DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING;  
8 AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."  
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10 WHEREAS, Montana is home to nearly 90,000 veterans; and

11 WHEREAS, the Montana Veterans' Affairs Division (MVAD) operates 9 field offices and employs 22  
12 veteran service officers (VSOs) specially trained, certified, and accredited to file claims for federal VA benefits  
13 on behalf of Montana's veterans; and

14 WHEREAS, in FY 2019, MVAD VSOs submitted 14,566 claims and maintained a total caseload of  
15 19,549, which represents about 22% of Montana's total veteran population; and

16 WHEREAS, VSO claims work has resulted in more than \$233 million in federal VA pension and  
17 disability compensation paid to Montana's veterans in FY 2019; and

18 WHEREAS, during its HJ 23 study of the structure and funding of MVAD veteran services, the State  
19 Administration and Veterans' Affairs Interim Committee (SAVA) heard consensus testimony that administrative  
20 support staff for VSOs would significantly increase VSO outreach and productivity so that more veterans could  
21 be served and more federal dollars could be paid to Montana's veterans; and

22 WHEREAS, SAVA recommends that the state specifically fund administrative support staff for the  
23 MVAD's VSOs and that MVAD collect data on outreach and productivity and report back to the legislature for a  
24 determination about continued funding for administrative support for VSOs employed by MVAD.  
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26 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MONTANA:  
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28 NEW SECTION. Section 1. **Appropriation for administrative support staff for state veteran**

1 **service officers -- reports.** (1) There is appropriated \$300,000 from the state general fund to the department  
2 of military affairs for the biennium ending June 30, 2023, for the purposes of subsection (2).

3 (2) (a) The money appropriated under this section must be used to fund administrative support staff for  
4 Montana veteran service officers employed under the Montana veterans' affairs division.

5 (b) The division shall allocate the funding to those offices where administrative support is most needed  
6 to increase outreach and serve more veterans in the service area. The division shall explore and implement  
7 creative ways to leverage administrative support so that is most cost effective and productive.

8 (c) The division shall track data on VSO outreach and productivity in those offices receiving the  
9 administrative support and report its findings to the state administration and veterans' affairs interim committee  
10 during the 2021-2022 interim and to the house appropriations and senate finance and claims committees during  
11 the 2023 session.

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13 NEW SECTION. **Section 2. Effective date.** [This act] is effective July 1, 2021.

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