

to the tens of thousands of service members discharged from active duty each year in California.

- 2) **Background.** Existing law permits the board of supervisors of each county to appoint a CVSO, who must be a veteran, and whose duty is to assist veterans in obtaining veterans benefits and to perform any other veteran-related service requested by the board. The compensation and expenses of the CVSO are the responsibility of the county, but CalVet, through a state budget appropriation, pays each county a portion of those costs. The 2025-26 state budget appropriated \$11 million to CalVet to support CVSOs. CalVet disburses these funds on a pro-rata basis to counties who have appointed a CVSO and meet certain conditions.

The California Association of CVSOs (association) reports that claims filed through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs with the assistance of a CVSO have a higher rate of approval, demonstrating the value of CVSOs in guiding veterans through a complicated bureaucracy and connecting them to the benefits they deserve. The association asserts, however, that many veterans are unaware of the role CVSOs play and the resources they provide. The association also reports the state's ratio of veterans to veterans' service representatives lags behind other states, resulting in many veterans missing out on the benefits they are entitled to.

Recently, the Solano County CVSO placed a veterans' service representative at Travis Air Force Base. The author claims the Solano veterans' service officer has served an average of 10 discharging service members per day and secured nearly \$95 million in VA benefits. The author wants to replicate Solano County's approach statewide to connect more veterans to CVSOs with the goal of securing more federal benefits for California's veterans.

- 3) **Prior Legislation.** AB 684 (Ta), of the 2023-24 Legislative Session, was substantially similar to this bill. AB 684 was held on this committee's suspense file.

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