

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 2219 (Schiavo)

As Amended April 8, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Enhances the collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) and County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs). Improves accreditation training CalVet provides CVSOs to reduce disparities, improve public awareness, and update data collection.

COMMENTS

- 1) *History of Veterans' Benefits.* The support for veterans' benefits can be traced back to the Continental Congress of 1776, which enacted pensions for disabled soldiers during the Revolutionary War. In the 19th century, support was extended to widows and dependents of veterans. Founded at the height of the Great Depression, the Veterans Administration was formerly an independent government agency. It was elevated to a cabinet department in 1989 and renamed to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The VA provided and continues to provide medical care, benefits, and essential services to veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. The VA has a long history of achievements and persistent challenges. They have faced criticism for their long wait times and slow processing of benefits. In addition to providing some health care services and disability compensation, the VA also provides vocational rehabilitation, education assistance, home loans, life insurance, and burial benefits to eligible veterans.
- 2) *County Veteran Service Officers.* CVSOs operate at the intersection of policy and people, providing vital support to veterans in offices of varying sizes and often under challenging conditions. CVSOs serve as the critical link between veterans and the wide array of benefits, services, and community networks essential for long-term success following military service. Fifty-six of California's 58 counties have CVSOs. The services provided by CVSOs are free to veterans and their families. CalVet and CVSOs are partners in California, with CVSOs serving as the front-line support for veterans and their families, while CalVet assists with claims development, representation, and appeals. CVSOs are a critical component in the state's efforts to work directly with individual veterans and their families to ensure our veterans receive the benefits they earned through their service to our nation. In addition to advocating for benefits, CVSOs also assist veterans in accessing employment, education, healthcare, family support, and opportunities that promote a sense of purpose, stability, and belonging. What sets this system apart is not only its extensive reach but also its dependable nature; when veterans reach out for assistance, CVSOs are consistently available to help. Both the VA and the State of California offer resources and services to help veterans navigate the claims process. To assist veterans and their families in navigating the claims process, 29 states, including California, use the CVSO model, and six states use a state service officer model. The financial impact that CVSOs make for veterans and their families is easy to measure. According to the California Association of County Veterans Service Officers annual report, the amount of new and increased federal benefits CVSOs were able to secure was more than \$687 million. What is not easy to measure are the most meaningful outcomes that are not captured in standard metrics: a veteran connected to lifetime health care; a surviving spouse able to pursue education; a family restored to stability; a long-

overdue recognition that restores dignity and pride. These outcomes are the direct result of the partnership, expertise, and advocacy of CVSOs and CalVet.

According to the Author

This bill, known as the Faster Service for Veterans Act, will speed up the modernization of delivering assistance to veterans, facilitate easier access to their benefits and more efficient support in the process. This bill fosters a stronger partnership between CalVet and CVSOs, directs the collection of more meaningful data, and will structure the offices in a way to better serve veterans. Additionally, it will establish a reliable satisfaction survey to promptly identify areas for improvement and make real-time adjustments. With this bill, we will ensure no veteran is overlooked in our commitment to their well-being.

Arguments in Support

CACVSO writes in support of this bill that navigating the landscape of veteran benefits, from disability compensation and pensions to educational support and healthcare, can be an overwhelming process. CVSOs are a cornerstone of the state and county veteran service model because we provide the direct, localized expertise required to guide veterans through these complex systems. CVSOs rely heavily on CalVet for the thorough uniform training and oversight necessary to deliver high-quality claims support. While strong local and state partnerships have long sustained our work, this bill represents a crucial step toward modernizing our network and guaranteeing uninterrupted access to our offices. CACVSO continues that beyond staffing, this bill tackles current hurdles by establishing a centralized, statewide work queue. This forward-thinking approach will allow veterans to connect with our representatives much more efficiently, significantly cutting down on wait times for remote appointments. Coupled with streamlined, statewide training requirements, this bill will foster greater expertise across California. It helps guarantee that veterans, service members, and their families will receive the exact same level of accurate, expert guidance regardless of which county they call home. Numerous Congressionally chartered veteran organizations also wrote in support stating, CVSOs are the frontline connection for veterans navigating federal benefits. Current law permits counties to appoint CVSOs but sets no timeline for filling vacancies and no statewide standards for service delivery. When a CVSO position sits vacant, veterans in that county lose their primary point of access to earned benefits - and the state loses the federal dollars those benefits bring into local economies. This bill addresses these gaps directly by requiring the vacancies to be filled within 12 months, mandates VA accreditation within nine months of appointment, and directs CalVet to stand up a statewide work queue by January 1, 2028. The work queue is particularly significant -- it would allow veterans in underserved or understaffed counties to access claims assistance through any participating CVSO office rather than waiting for their local office to have capacity. This bill also establishes a service capacity and performance framework that ties funding to measurable outcomes while protecting offices that participate in the statewide queue from being penalized in performance calculations.

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) CalVet estimates one-time General Fund (GF) costs of approximately \$500,000 over two years for two research staff and administrative support to conduct the study regarding the

configuration, structure, and operations of each CVSO. The initial report is due January 1, 2029. Subsequent reports are due every three years, which will each result ongoing, intermittent GF costs of an unknown amount, but likely less than the cost of the initial report.

- 2) CalVet indicates all other costs are minor and absorbable.
- 3) Local costs to counties of an unknown amount to administer the digital veteran satisfaction survey designed to collect feedback from veterans following appointments or services provided by county veterans service offices. The bill requires CACVSO to consult with CalVet in the development of the digital survey platform and requires CalVet, to the extent feasible, to utilize existing reporting mechanisms and data systems to minimize administrative burden on counties. These costs are potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.

The Legislative Analyst's Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

VOTES

ASM MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS: 8-0-0

YES: Schiavo, Jeff Gonzalez, Ávila Farías, Carrillo, Davies, Irwin, Quirk-Silva, Valencia

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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