

CHAPTER 2023-164

Committee Substitute for House Bill No. 635

An act relating to dental services for veterans; creating s. 295.157, F.S.; providing legislative findings and intent; defining terms; establishing the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program in the Department of Veterans' Affairs; specifying the purpose of the program; requiring the department to contract with a direct-support organization to administer the program; requiring the department to adopt rules; providing that program funding is subject to legislative appropriation; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 295.157, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

295.157 Veterans Dental Care Grant Program.—

(1) The Legislature finds that veterans are not afforded dental care after serving in the United States Armed Forces unless they are totally and permanently disabled or have a direct service-connected injury impacting their oral health. The Legislature further finds that this has left many veterans without access to routine dental care for many years and has resulted in severe dental conditions that worsen due to a lack of access to proper dental treatment. It is the intent of the Legislature to create the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program to provide veterans the opportunity to access routine dental care after they conclude their service protecting this country's freedom.

(2) As used in this section, the term:

(a) "Department" means the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

(b) "Veteran" has the same meaning as in s. 1.01(14). The term includes all members of the Florida National Guard and United States Reserve Forces who were discharged or released under honorable conditions only, or who later received an upgraded discharge under honorable conditions.

(3) The Veterans Dental Care Grant Program is established within the Department of Veterans' Affairs. The purpose of the program is to provide oral health care to veterans who reside in this state.

(4) The department shall contract with a statewide direct-support organization to administer the Veterans Dental Care Grant Program. The statewide direct-support organization must have proven experience developing and implementing veteran-relevant programs, including dental service programs. The organization is responsible for distributing grants to eligible nonprofits that have experience in providing dental care to veterans.

(5) The department shall adopt rules to administer the program.

(6) Funding for the program is subject to appropriation by the Legislature.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.

Approved by the Governor May 26, 2023.

Filed in Office Secretary of State May 26, 2023.