

SESSION OF 2024

SUPPLEMENTAL NOTE ON HOUSE BILL NO. 2760

As Amended by Senate Committee on Ways
and Means

Brief*

HB 2760 would abolish the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office (KCVAO), create the Kansas Office of Veterans Services (KOV), and make other changes relating to the transfer of powers, duties, and functions. The bill would also update the Veterans Claims Assistance Program (VCAP) to include references to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and cross accreditation requirements.

***Transfer of Powers, Duties, and Functions to the KOV
(New Section 1)***

The bill would abolish the KCVAO. All powers, duties, and functions of the agency and the KCVAO Director would be transferred to the KOV and the KOV Director. The bill would rename the KCVAO as the KOV. The bill would deem references to KCVAO in statutes, contracts, or other documents as applicable to the KOV.

[*Note:* From 1986 until 2014, the KCVAO was known as the Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs and was governed by a commission. In 2014, the Commission was abolished and all powers, duties, and functions were conferred upon the then renamed KCVAO.]

*Supplemental notes are prepared by the Legislative Research Department and do not express legislative intent. The supplemental note and fiscal note for this bill may be accessed on the Internet at <http://www.kslegislature.org>

Establishment of the KOVS (New Section 2)

The bill would establish the KOVS within the executive branch of government. Only a veteran who is appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Kansas Senate would be permitted to serve as the KOVS Director. Under the bill, the KOVS Director would serve at the pleasure of the Governor in unclassified service and receive an annual salary fixed by the Governor. The KOVS Director would supervise the administration of all budgeting, purchasing, and related management functions of the agency.

Statutory Responsibilities (New Section 3)

The bill would confer the current responsibilities of the KCVAO to the KOVS.

Under current law, the KCVAO is responsible for providing information and advice on available veterans programs and services to veterans, their relatives, and their dependents. The programs and services coordinated by the agency include those in the fields of education, health care, mental care, economic security, and vocational guidance. The agency is also responsible for operating the Kansas Soldiers' Home and the Kansas Veterans' Home.

Veterans Claims Assistance Program Service Grant Requirements (Section 23)

The bill would replace references to the obsolete federal Veterans Administration with references to the federal Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This means that in order to be eligible to participate in the annual VCAP service grant, veterans service organizations (VSOs) would be required to have a presence at the federal VA regional office or medical center in Wichita, as well as each VA medical center operating in Topeka and Leavenworth.

Moreover, the bill would specify that VCAR training be conducted by qualified trainers, rather than qualified veterans claims assistance representatives. An individual who wishes to be an accredited VCAR would be required to provide proof to the KCVAO that such an individual successfully completed the VA Office Training, Responsibility, Involvement, and Preparation of Claims course.

Under current law, the VCAP requires the KCVAO to administer annual service grants to eligible VSOs. The service grants are used to train veterans who wish to become accredited veterans claims assistance representatives (VCARs). Accredited VCARs are statutorily able to assist other veterans and their dependents in filing claims with the federal government for earned benefits.

Technical Amendments (Sections 4-60)

The bill would make technical amendments to ensure consistency in statutory phrasing and to remove outdated language. The bill would also replace references in continuing law to the KCVAO with references to the KOVS. Finally, the bill would repeal statutes regarding the establishment of the KCVAO and its duties.

Background

The Senate Committee on Ways and Means inserted the contents of HB 2623 into HB 2760 while retaining the contents of HB 2760.

HB 2760

The bill was introduced by the House Committee on Veterans and Military at the request of a representative of the KCVAO.

House Committee on Veterans and Military

In the House Committee hearing on February 13, 2024, **proponent** testimony was provided by Representative Hill and a representative of the KCVAO. The proponents generally noted that the bill would change the name of the agency from the KCVAO to the KOVS which would better reflect the agency's mission to serve veterans and, in turn, increase awareness of the agency among veterans.

No other testimony was provided.

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

In the Senate Committee hearing on March 12, 2024, **proponent** testimony was provided by a representative of the KCVAO. The proponent stated that the bill would alleviate confusion amongst members of the public who mistakenly believe that the KCVAO is part of the federal VA. The proponent further testified that changing the name of the agency from KCVAO to KOVS would allow the agency's mission to serve veterans to be more well known.

No other testimony was provided.

The Senate Committee amended the bill to add the provisions of HB 2623, a bill to update the VCAP.

HB 2623

The bill was introduced by the House Committee on Veterans and Military at the request of a representative of the KCVAO.

House Committee on Veterans and Military

In the House Committee hearing on February 8, 2024, **proponent** testimony was provided by Representative S.

Ruiz and representatives of the KCVAO and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). The proponents generally noted that the bill would allow the KCVAO to partner with numerous other organizations recognized by and approved by the VA to provide veteran service representative training. In addition, the representative from the MOAA testified that the bill would lead to an increase in the number of submitted claims, which, in turn, could lead to an increase in the amount of federal benefits paid to veterans in Kansas.

No other testimony was provided.

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

In the Senate Committee hearing on March 12, 2024, **proponent** testimony was provided by a representative of the KCVAO. The proponent stated that the bill would allow the KCVAO and partner VSOs in VCAP to work with a wider variety of accredited and federally approved training organizations. The proponent further stated that the updated references to medical centers would allow VCAP partners to occupy work spaces in the federal VA Medical Centers and the new VA Regional Office in Wichita. This could result in an increase in the number of VCARs in Kansas who assist veterans in filing claims for earned benefits.

No other testimony was provided.

Fiscal Information

According to the fiscal notes prepared by the Division of the Budget on the bills, as introduced, the bills would have a negligible fiscal effect on the agency.

The KCVAO states that enactment of HB 2760, as introduced, would require \$18,000, all from the State General Fund (SGF), in both FY 2025 and FY 2026. However, the agency states that SGF appropriations from their Kansas Cemeteries Program and Veteran Services Program will be

utilized and no additional appropriations will be needed. The agency reports that a complete inventory of all KCVAO locations was performed to develop a consolidated list of items that would need to be reimaged with the new agency name. The agency would intend to purchase the new signage over a two-year period. This would allow the agency time to develop and receive approval for the office seal used on signage. The agency also notes that the majority of the signage is approximately \$50 per item for window stickers, office signs, etc. Each cemetery has a large (40 inch) bronze medallion located at the entrance to all cemeteries that would cost an estimated \$8,000 per seal to update. The agency would also seek other options to explore lower cost alternatives for the seals. Additionally, KCVAO would work with its website vendor to update the name and logo on the agency website. Any fiscal effect associated with HB 2760 is not reflected in *The FY 2025 Governor's Budget Report*.

Furthermore, the KCVAO states that enactment of HB 2623, as introduced, would have no fiscal effect on the agency.

Veterans and military; Kansas Commission on Veterans Affairs Office; Kansas Office of Veterans Services; veterans affairs; veterans services; Veterans Claims Assistance Program; VCAP; Veterans Affairs medical centers