

CHAPTER 375

AN ACT establishing the New Jersey Commission on Veterans' Benefits in the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs and supplementing chapter 3 of Title 38A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

C.38A:3-56 New Jersey Commission on Veterans' Benefits.

1. a. There is hereby established in the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs the New Jersey Commission on Veterans' Benefits consisting of 13 members as follows:

- (1) the Adjutant General of the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, or his or her designee, who shall serve as chairperson;
- (2) the Commissioner of the Department of Human Services, or a designee;
- (3) the Commissioner of the Department of Health, or a designee;
- (4) the Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs, or a designee;
- (5) the Commissioner of the Department of Education, or a designee;
- (6) the Commissioner of the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, or a designee;
- (7) the Secretary of State, or a designee;
- (8) the Attorney General, or a designee; and

(9) five public members who are residents of this State and who are veterans, as defined under section 2 of P.L.1987, c.444 (C.38A:3-1.2), one to be appointed by the Governor, and four to be appointed one each by the President of the Senate, the Senate Minority Leader, the Speaker of the General Assembly, and the Assembly Minority Leader. At least two of the five public members shall be women veterans.

The public members of the commission shall serve for terms of three years and until the appointment and qualification of their successors, except that of the initial appointment of public members, three shall be appointed for a term of three years, and two shall be appointed for a term of two years. Any vacancy in the membership of the commission shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointments are made.

b. The commission shall organize as soon as practicable after the appointment of a majority of its members and shall select from among its members a vice chairperson. The members shall select a secretary, who need not be a member of the commission. Thereafter, the commission shall meet quarterly and at the call of the chairperson. A meeting of the commission may also be called upon at the request of seven of the commission members, and seven members of the commission shall constitute a quorum at any meeting thereof. The commission may conduct public hearings at such places and at such times as it shall designate, at which it may solicit the testimony of interested persons, groups and the general public.

c. The commission shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of employees of any State, county or municipal department, board, bureau, commission or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes. The Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs shall provide such organizational and personnel support as the commission may request. All departments and agencies of the State shall furnish such advice and information, documentation, and assistance to the commission as is deemed necessary or desirable by the commission to facilitate its purposes.

d. The members of the commission shall serve without compensation, but the public members may be reimbursed for necessary and reasonable expenses incurred in the

performance of their duties within the limits of funds appropriated or otherwise made available to it for its purposes.

C.38A:3-57 Duties of commissioner.

2. a. It shall be the duty of the New Jersey Commission on Veterans' Benefits to develop, maintain and annually update a five-year Statewide veterans' benefits strategic plan that includes goals and measurable outcomes to ensure that all State departments and agencies are effectively delivering comprehensive services and support for veterans and their families in this State.

b. In developing and updating the strategic plan, the commission shall conduct an analysis to identify the various programs and benefits provided by the State to the veteran population, and to evaluate those programs to assess their status and effectiveness. Areas of analysis shall include, but need not be limited to, each existing program's status, successes, and challenges in addressing the veteran population's: (1) access to benefits; (2) educational, job skills, employment, and business opportunities; (3) physical and behavioral health and long-term healthcare options; (4) criminal justice issues; (5) housing opportunities and homelessness; and (6) special needs as determined by the commission. The strategic plan shall be based upon comprehensive data gained through open and transparent engagement with State departments and agencies and veterans' stakeholders.

c. The commission shall develop recommendations to be submitted to the Governor and the Legislature to address any deficiencies in the provision of benefits and services to veterans in this State. The recommendations shall specifically address whether the existing State programs, services, and resources are adequate to meet the veteran population's existing needs; are being used to fulfill objectives in a manner that complements and leverages State, federal, and private resources; and how they may more effectively deliver veterans' services to all current and future veterans in the State of New Jersey.

C.38A:3-58 Strategic plan, reports.

3. The commission shall prepare and submit an initial five-year strategic plan to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), within six months of the organization of the commission. Thereafter, the commission shall prepare and submit annual reports to the Governor and the Legislature containing its findings, activities and recommendations, including any recommendations for administrative and legislative action that it deems appropriate.

4. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 16, 2018.