

A Bill for an Act Relating to the Office of Veterans' Services.

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

SECTION 1. In 1976, the legislature declared, in language now codified in section 6E-1, Hawaii Revised Statutes, that:

- (1) The historic heritage of the State is among its important assets and that the rapid social and economic developments of contemporary society threatened to destroy the remaining vestiges of this heritage;
- (2) It is in the public interest to engage in a comprehensive program of historic preservation at all levels of government to promote the use and conservation of this property for the education, inspiration, pleasure, and enrichment of its citizens; and
- (3) It is the public policy of this State to provide leadership in preserving, restoring, and maintaining historic property, to ensure the administration of this historic property in a spirit of stewardship and trusteeship for future generations, and to conduct activities, plans, and programs in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of historic property.

The State's war memorials are intended to remind future generations about the freedoms for which so many sacrificed so much for us all. Our veterans' cemeteries are the final resting place of our country's fallen heroes and their comrades-in-arms. Both have the same ultimate goal—to honor, but the maintenance of these memorials reflects something entirely different—shabby neglect that borders on disrespect and dishonor. Some of our war memorials and veterans' cemeteries no longer have the appearance of being hallowed ground. The State's war memorials are deteriorating due to years neglect and indifference—literally falling into the sea in the case of the Waikiki Natatorium, which is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Natatorium, unfortunately, is not unique in this regard. The recently dedicated Korean-Vietnam Memorial, now less than a year old, is already being stained by water spots, etched by the elements, and is deteriorating because of lack of proper maintenance. This neglect must end.

Hawaii's war memorials and veterans' cemeteries are our promise to veterans that their deeds and names will not be forgotten. How this State cares for its war memorials and veterans' cemeteries is a reflection of the esteem in which it holds the men and women who fought and died for their country. We therefore have an obligation to ensure that these war memorials and veterans' cemeteries continue to serve the purposes for which they are intended, and garner the respect that they truly deserve for their country. The enactment of a single law cannot alone undo the years of neglect that have caused some war memorials to deteriorate badly, but this Act will begin to correct the years of neglect by requiring the appropriate state agencies to maintain a level of vigilance with regard to the memorials that has not been shown to date.

The purpose of this Act is to require the office of veterans' services to annually inspect all state war memorials and veterans' cemeteries for repair and maintenance deficiencies, and report all repair and maintenance problems at these memorials and cemeteries to the adjutant general, the comptroller, and the legislature in order to ensure that potential problems are detected and corrected as expeditiously as possible.

SECTION 2. Section 363-3, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended to read as follows:

“§363-3 Activities of the office. Except as otherwise provided by law, the office shall:

- (1) Maintain or cause to be maintained, subject to the control and supervision of the office, a center to which veterans, including their families and dependents, may come for information, counsel, aid, and assistance, and by which they may be directed or referred to any agency in the community whose function it is, by law or otherwise, to provide the services, assistance, or benefits which in each instance appear necessary or appropriate. Agencies to which any referrals may be made shall include, but are not limited to, departments and divisions of the federal and state governments, veterans’ organizations, and so-called “private” social agencies[.];
- (2) Assume the initiative, in cooperation with agencies in the community, for coordinating all services now available, and which hereafter may become available, for the use and benefit of veterans, including their families and dependents, to the end that maximum effectiveness of the services may be realized, and overlapping and duplication of effort as between agencies may be minimized[.];
- (3) Assemble, analyze, compile, and disseminate factual, up-to-date information with respect to:
 - (A) [benefits,] Benefits, rights, and services of whatever nature to which veterans, including their families and dependents, are entitled, or which may be available to them[.]; and
 - (B) [the] The structure, functions, area of service, and other pertinent information regarding each agency and organization participating in the veterans’ assistance program in the State[.];
- (4) Cooperate with federal departments and other agencies which, by law, have responsibility for the administration of rights and benefits granted by the federal government to veterans, including their families and dependents[.];
- (5) As soon as [may be] possible after the close of each fiscal year, compile and submit to the governor, for such use or distribution as the governor may deem appropriate, a comprehensive report of the activities and operations of the office, and of all disbursements and expenditures authorized by [it hereunder.] the office under this section; and
- (6) Inspect annually all state war memorials and veterans’ cemeteries for repair and maintenance deficiencies, and report all repair and maintenance problems at these memorials and cemeteries to the adjutant general, the comptroller, and the legislature prior to the start of each regular session.”

SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed. New statutory material is underscored.

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Became law on April 27, 1995, without the Governor’s signature, pursuant to Art. III, §16, State Constitution.)