An act to add Chapter 6 (commencing with Section 1860) to Division 8 of the Military and Veterans Code, relating to veterans.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL’S DIGEST

SB 112, as amended, Roth. Veterans—California Veterans’ Bill of Rights.

Existing law establishes within state government a Department of Veterans Affairs. Existing law provides for a variety of state benefits to veterans, including those relating to educational assistance and farm and home purchases, as specified.

This bill would establish a California Veterans’ Bill of Rights. The bill would proclaim the rights of veterans in the State of California, including, among others, that veterans have the right to be treated with dignity, understanding, and respect, and have the right to housing, education, job training, and physical and mental health services, as prescribed.


The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The Legislature hereby finds and declares all of the following:
(a) With over two million veterans, California has the highest veteran population of any state in the union. California’s veteran population faces disproportionately high levels of homelessness and unemployment. Many veterans suffer from the effects of combat injuries, and many others suffer from combat-related psychological trauma that manifests itself in mental health disorders. (b) Veterans are deserving of our highest gratitude for their selfless service and sacrifice, and are further deserving of the utmost treatment and care upon returning home. Upon discharge, the initial period of transition to civilian life is critical to successful reintegration, and identifying active duty military service members who are transitioning to civilian life in California is important to actively increasing the standard of living for current and future veterans in need of assistance. (c) To that end, it is necessary that the Legislature establish a California Veterans’ Bill of Rights.

SEC. 2. Chapter 6 (commencing with Section 1860) is added to Division 8 of the Military and Veterans Code, to read:

Chapter 6. California Veterans’ Bill of Rights

1860. There is hereby established a California Veterans’ Bill of Rights, as set forth in this chapter.

1862. Veterans in the State of California shall have all of the following rights:

(a) Veterans shall have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and to receive accurate, courteous, and timely service in all of their contacts with the Department of Veterans Affairs and any other state agency that administers programs that serve veterans.

(b) Veterans shall have the right to receive fair and equal treatment, irrespective of rank, position, or status, and shall be treated with tact, comprehension, and understanding in their contacts with government agencies or private entities contracted with government entities to provide services to veteran populations.

(c) Veterans shall have the right to be involved in the decisions affecting their care and the formulation of programs and benefits that affect their daily lives.
(d) Veterans, both current and transitioning active duty military members, who are likely to be California veterans, shall have the right to be informed of all programs and benefits for which they are eligible.

(e) Veterans shall have the right to file an application for benefits at any time and shall have the right to receive a written notice and explanation of the approval or denial of their application for benefits.

(f) Veterans shall have the right to be provided with equal benefits in any part of the state in which they, their spouses, domestic partners, or their dependents reside. Geographical location shall not determine the quality or level of service or care provided.

(g) Veterans—

(1) When housed in state or local veterans housing or housing provided by private groups contracting to receive state funds for housing veterans, veterans shall have the right to adequate, safe, and reliable housing.

(2) Veterans shall have the right to housing that provides adequate and appropriate mental health and transitional support services, including counseling, employment training, and substance abuse treatment.

(h) Veterans shall have the right to the education and job training they require to secure gainful civilian employment.

(i) Veterans shall have the right to receive the physical and mental health services they require as a result of their service. Veterans shall have a right to receive these services free from fear of retaliation or stigma. Physical and mental health services shall not be negatively impacted or withheld from a person due solely to his or her veteran status. State and local mental health services shall not be negatively impacted or withheld from a person due to his or her veteran status.

(j) Veterans shall have the right to refuse services or benefits without fear of retaliation or stigma. In that respect, no veteran shall be compelled to decline services or benefits against his or her will, and every reasonable effort shall be made to connect veterans with the services and benefits to which they are rightfully entitled.

1864. The rights prescribed pursuant to this chapter are not exhaustive, and nothing in this chapter shall be construed to limit the rights of veterans. Instead, the rights prescribed pursuant to this chapter shall establish the minimum rights every veteran shall
enjoy as a resident of the State of California. When applicable, veterans’ spouses, domestic partners, and dependents shall also be entitled to these rights.