

H. B. 4439

(By Delegates Manypenny, Barrett, Young, Iaquina, Moore, Longstreth, Hamilton, Walker, Mr. Speaker, (Mr. Miley), Sponaugle and Wells

[Introduced February 7, 2014; referred to the Committee on Agriculture & Natural Resources then Finance.]

FISCAL NOTE

A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new section, designated §19-1-11, relating to granting the Department of Agriculture the authority to create and maintain a program to encourage, support and develop West Virginia veterans into the field of agriculture; creating the Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Fund; making findings and establishing intent; exempting the Department of Agriculture from certain competitive bidding requirements; requiring state departments to work together; setting forth funding requirements; and setting forth disbursements.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

That the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, be amended by adding thereto a new section, designated §19-1-11, to read as follows:

ARTICLE 1. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE.

§19-1-11. Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Fund; findings;

1 cooperation with other departments; disbursements.

2 (a) Legislative findings: --

3 (1) West Virginians have a longstanding tradition of service
4 in the Armed Forces of the United States that dates back to the
5 creation of the state, many of them leaving their occupation as
6 farmers to take up arms against the enemy.

7 (2) Veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States return
8 to West Virginia are often unable to find gainful employment,
9 resulting in an alarming rate of unemployment amongst veterans and
10 a blow to West Virginia's economy.

11 (3) In addition to physical wounds, veterans also often face
12 other hardships, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic
13 brain injuries, and other afflictions that may render a veteran
14 prone to homelessness, difficulty assimilating back into society,
15 and other personal and domestic problems.

16 (4) Agriculture is a critical ingredient in West Virginia's
17 economy and it has potential to have an even bigger impact on the
18 economy. Agriculture offers solitude in its work which, in addition
19 to offering meaningful employment, has been shown to be therapeutic
20 to those suffering from physical and emotional afflictions similar
21 to what veterans face upon returning from combat. Exploring
22 opportunities to engage West Virginia's veterans in agriculture is
23 beneficial to the health and welfare of veterans, as well as to the
24 future of West Virginia's agriculture economy.

1 (b) Legislative Intent. -- It is the intent of the
2 Legislature that the Department of Agriculture create and maintain
3 a program to encourage, support and develop West Virginia veterans
4 into the field of agriculture.

5 (c) (1) In order to increase the number of veterans involved in
6 agriculture and widen the scope of veteran activities and
7 opportunities in agriculture, the Department of Agriculture shall
8 develop programs to introduce veterans to agricultural
9 opportunities and support veterans currently working in
10 agriculture. These activities and opportunities include, but are
11 not limited to returning post-mine land to an agriculture purpose,
12 expanding the apiary industry, exploring niche crops, developing
13 livestock and increasing the aquaculture industry.

14 (2) The Department of Agriculture shall have the opportunity
15 to call upon any state department, or officer of the state or
16 county, to cooperate in furthering this effort, and it shall be the
17 duty of any such department or officer, upon request of the
18 commissioner, to render the assistance required. The commissioner
19 may also cooperate with any corporation, nonprofit organization,
20 individual or other entity to further this effort.

21 (3) The Department of Veterans' Assistance shall work in
22 conjunction with the Department of Agriculture and the State's
23 Adjutant General to assist in recruiting, training and verifying
24 the status of veterans eligible under this program, as well as

1 developing and supporting program elements.

2 (d) Notwithstanding any provision in this code to the
3 contrary, should the Department of Agriculture deem it necessary to
4 provide land for activities within this program, it is exempt from
5 purchasing requirements as they relate to the competitive leasing
6 of state property.

7 (e) There is hereby created in the State Treasury a separate
8 special revenue account, which shall be an interest bearing
9 account, to be known as the "Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture
10 Fund." The special revenue account shall consist of moneys derived
11 from leasing of the Department of Agriculture's property associated
12 with this program, moneys from the Department of Agriculture's farm
13 account not utilized for farm operations, private or charitable
14 donations, all amounts appropriated by the Legislature to maintain
15 and operate the programs, and all interest or other earnings from
16 moneys in the fund.

17 (f) Moneys in the special revenue account shall be
18 appropriated to the Department of Agriculture and used exclusively,
19 in accordance with appropriations by the Legislature, to pay costs,
20 fees and expenses incurred, or to be incurred that support the
21 programs developed to aid veterans.

22 (g) Any balance remaining in the special revenue account at
23 the end of any state fiscal year shall not revert to the General
24 Revenue Fund but shall remain in the special revenue account and

1 shall be used solely in a manner consistent with this section.

2 (h) Disbursements from the special revenue account shall be

3 authorized by the commissioner.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to grant the Department of Agriculture the authority to create and maintain a program to encourage, support and develop West Virginia veterans into the field of agriculture. The bill creates the Veterans and Warriors to Agriculture Fund. The bill makes findings and establishes intent. The bill exempts the Department of Agriculture from certain competitive bidding requirements. The bill requires state departments to work together. The bill sets forth funding requirements. The bill sets forth disbursements.

This section is new; therefore, it has been completely underscored.