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FISCAL IMPACT REPORT

ORIGINAL DATE 02/15/07

SPONSOR Ortiz y Pino LAST UPDATED _____ HB _____

SHORT TITLE Health of Veterans Exposed to Uranium SB 841

ANALYST Hanika Ortiz

APPROPRIATION (dollars in thousands)

Appropriation		Recurring or Non-Rec	Fund Affected
FY07	FY08		
	\$200.0	recurring	General fund

(Parenthesis () Indicate Expenditure Decreases)

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

LFC Files

Responses Received From

Department of Health (DOH)

SUMMARY

Synopsis of Bill

Senate Bill 841 appropriates \$200 thousand from the General Fund to the DOH to develop and establish a volunteer registry of military veterans who may have been exposed to depleted uranium or other radioisotopes during the Persian Gulf War, current Iraq or Afghanistan conflict; establishes testing protocols; and, contracts with a testing laboratory to conduct the exposure monitoring.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

The appropriation of \$200 thousand contained in this bill is a recurring expense to the general fund. Any unexpended or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of FY08 shall revert to the general fund.

The appropriation was not part of the Executive Budget Recommendation for the Department in FY08.

The bill does not include funding for follow up counseling or treatment of those individuals who test positive for exposure.

SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

DOH reports the use of depleted uranium or other radioisotopes used in recent military actions in the Persian Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan have raised questions about the potential exposure of combat personnel serving in these actions; and, about possible health issues resulting from any such exposure. SB 841 establishes, on a voluntary basis, a program within the DOH in which military veterans of these conflicts could register and get tested, at no cost to themselves, for exposure to depleted uranium or other isotopes.

PERFORMANCE IMPLICATIONS

SB 841 conforms to the DOH mission as stated on the FY08 Strategic Plan to promote health and prevent disease and disability.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The DOH will be the administrator of the appropriation in the bill.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

The Department of Veteran's Affairs website notes that depleted uranium (DU) is a by-product of the uranium enrichment process; it possesses less U-235 and about 50% of the radioactivity of natural uranium. During the Gulf War, uranium containing munitions were used on a large scale for the first time. It was used by the United States military in projectiles and armor for tanks. While thousands of military personnel had proximity to uranium munitions, either as they were stockpiled, transported or while riding in vehicles carrying these weapons, of most concern have been those individuals who were on or in vehicles when struck by depleted uranium projectiles. DU is a radiation hazard primarily if internalized, such as in shrapnel, contaminated wounds, and inhalation. In addition to its radioactivity, DU has some chemical toxicity related to being a heavy metal, similar to lead.

When the DU Program was established in 1993, only a limited number of US veterans were known to have been directly wounded by DU weapons. In 1997, the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense became aware that a number of other service members beyond those first identified by DOH in 1993-1994, were also potentially exposed to DU. DOH's Office of the Special Assistant for Gulf War Illnesses (OSAGWI) was tasked with investigating and locating a number of veterans potentially exposed to DU beyond the original participants in the program. VACO officials in the Office of Public Health and Environmental Hazards, OSAGWI and Baltimore program officials collaborated to initiate a program to assess potential DU exposure to service members, identify and inform those service members of the possibility of exposure to DU and advise them of the availability of testing to determine current urine uranium levels.

ALTERNATIVES

The United States Veteran's Administration has a registry and conducts assessment, treatment, and monitoring of veterans. It needs to be determined if bringing this capacity to the DOH is a duplication of efforts.

WHAT WILL BE THE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT ENACTING THIS BILL

Funding will not be available to DOH to develop and establish a volunteer registry of military veterans who may have been exposed to depleted uranium or other radioisotopes; to establish testing protocols; and to contract with an appropriate testing laboratory to conduct exposure monitoring for veterans.

AHO/mt