

Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

SB 116 —Veterans

by Rules Committee; Appropriations Committee on Health and Human Services; and Senators Burgess, Collins, Avila, and Davis

The bill amends multiple provisions regarding veterans. Specifically, the bill:

- Reduces the maximum number of nominees the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council transmits to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) for submission to the Governor and Cabinet for induction into the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame from 20 to 5.
- Requires the FDVA to:
 - Expand the scope of an ongoing survey by evaluating veterans and their spouses and dependents' awareness of available programs and services and make recommendations increasing such awareness.
 - Ensure coordination with the U.S. Department of Defense regarding the reentry of servicemembers into civilian life. The FDVA may engage county and city veteran service officers for assistance in connecting servicemembers with civilian resources.
 - Report actions taken to implement provisions of the bill and to include in its 2025 annual report an evaluation of health literacy among Florida veterans along with its recommendations on increasing public awareness.
 - Develop a statewide plan to establish adult day health care facilities across the state to serve veterans and their families. The bill also directs the FDVA to provide a report detailing the plan to the Legislature by November 1, 2025.
- Expands the type of training to be provided to the FDVA claims examiners and county and city veterans service officers under the Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program to include mental health training. The bill requires pilot program participants to be trained to recognize indicators of mental health conditions and also requires the FDVA to contract with an organization having proven experience developing and implementing veteran-relevant and evidence-based mental health assistance to develop curriculum for such training.
- Requires Florida is For Veterans, Inc., to advise the FDVA on problems or needs of retired and recently separated military personnel and their spouses.
- Provides that a percentage of the proceeds from the sale of the Gadsden Flag specialty license plate may be used for administrative costs.

The bill appropriates \$50,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the FDVA to conduct a survey evaluating the extent to which resident veterans and their spouses and dependents are aware of existing programs and services and for the FDVA to develop a plan to establish adult day health care facilities to serve veterans and their families and \$300,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund to the FDVA to implement the Veteran Suicide Training Pilot Program, as amended by the bill.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2025.

Vote: Senate 39-0; House 98-0

Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/HB 797 — Veteran and Spouse Nursing Home Beds

by Intergovernmental Affairs Subcommittee and Rep. LaMarca and others (SB 788 by Senators Truenow and Gaetz)

The bill creates s. 296.415, F.S., to authorize a licensed skilled nursing facility located on the campus of a nonprofit retirement community that exclusively provides housing for veterans, their spouses, and surviving spouses to request to designate or alter the designation of certain beds as veteran and spouse nursing beds if the residents admitted meet the criteria for admissions to a state veterans' nursing home in s. 296.36, F.S., and the beds are operated according to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Community Nursing Home Program. The bill authorizes the director of the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) to approve a bed designation request if the request meets those requirements as well as the nondiscrimination, admissions, financial contribution, and inspection requirements for state veterans' nursing homes.

The bill revises exemptions to the certificate of need (CON) process for veterans nursing homes by providing that a CON is not required for:

- State veterans' nursing homes operated by or on behalf of the FDVA that are constructed with state or federal funds and where the federal government pays a per diem rate not to exceed one-half of the cost of the veterans' care.
- The consolidation or combination of licensed skilled nursing facilities or the transfer of beds between licensed skilled nursing facilities which are for the sole use of veterans, their spouses, or surviving spouses in accordance with s. 296.415, F.S., if the facilities have a shared controlling interest and are not more than 100 miles apart.

The bill authorizes the FDVA to adopt rules to implement the bed designation process for certain nonprofit retirement communities.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2025.

Vote: Senate 36-0; House 115-0

Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

CS/CS/SB 910 — Veterans' Benefits Assistance

by Rules Committee; Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security Committee;
and Senator Collins

The bill amends s. 435.02, F.S., to include the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) in the definition of "specified agency" for purposes of conducting state and national criminal history background screening on persons who work with children or persons who are elderly or disabled.

Additionally, the bill creates s. 501.9741, F.S., to govern the payment of fees by a veteran to an unaccredited person for advising, assisting, or consulting in securing federal benefits. The bill authorizes compensation for advising, assisting, or consulting with an individual regarding any preparation, presentation, or prosecution of a veteran's claim, or a claim by any other individual under the laws and regulations administered by the FDVA or the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) if, before rendering services, a written agreement is executed. Compensation for such services is contingent upon securing an increase in benefits awarded and may not exceed the lesser of four times the amount of the monthly increase in benefits awarded based on the claim or \$12,500. A provider must ensure that all individuals who directly assist a veteran in a veterans' benefits matter complete a level 2 background screening that screens for certain offenses before entering into an agreement with a veteran for veterans' benefits matters.

The bill prohibits a provider from guaranteeing, either directly or by implication, a successful outcome or that an individual is certain to receive specific veterans' benefits or a specific level, percentage, or amount of veterans' benefits. The bill also specifies prohibitions on the manner in which a provider of veterans' benefits matters advises, assists, or consults. In addition, the bill prohibits compensation for referring an individual to another person who will advise, assist, or consult with the individual regarding any preparation, presentation, or prosecution of a veteran's claim. The bill also prohibits compensation to a provider under certain conditions if a complaint based on the alleged absence of good faith is filed with the Consumer Protection Division of the Office of the Attorney General.

A violation of the provisions of the bill is a violation of the Florida Deceptive and Unfair Trade Practices Act. Violators may be subject to penalties for violations against a military servicemember or his or spouse or dependent child.

The bill may not be construed as applying to, limiting, or expanding the requirements imposed on agents or employees of the FDVA or agents or attorneys accredited by the VA.

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on state government.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become a law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect upon becoming law.

Vote: Senate 36-0; House 114-0

Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security

SB 1516 — Aerospace Industry

by Senator Wright

The bill establishes the International Aerospace Innovation Fund (IAIF), administered by Space Florida, to accelerate global aerospace innovation by funding collaborative research and development projects, workforce development initiatives, and commercialization efforts.

The bill requires that the IAIF:

- Develop partnerships between Florida-based aerospace companies and international aerospace companies.
- Drive innovation in critical technology areas related to aerospace as defined in s. 331.303, F.S., including, but not limited to, space exploration, advanced manufacturing, and space infrastructure.
- Attract global investment in Florida's aerospace ecosystem.

The bill requires Space Florida to secure funding for the IAIF which may be received from the state, private sector investments, or international contributions.

The bill also requires Space Florida to develop eligibility criteria for projects to be funded by the IAIF. At a minimum, a project must:

- Involve at least one aerospace company or organization that is based in this state;
- Be a partnership involving an international aerospace company, a university, a space agency, or a research institute; and
- Be intended, and have demonstrated potential, for commercialization.

Additionally, the bill requires Space Florida to establish a panel of experts to evaluate and recommend projects seeking funding by the IAIF and to establish an application process for the projects. Funding must be competitively awarded based on merit. Space Florida is also required to identify and establish partnerships with countries with robust aerospace sectors. The bill authorizes Space Florida to negotiate and enter into bilateral agreements for the purposes of the IAIF, which may include, but are not limited to, the establishment of co-funding commitments, intellectual property rights, and collaboration terms.

If approved by the Governor, or allowed to become law without the Governor's signature, these provisions take effect July 1, 2025.

Vote: Senate 36-0; House 115-0