

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

HB 231 — Services for Veterans and Their Families

by Rep. Zika and others (CS/SB 260 by Appropriations Committee and Senators Harrell, Wright, Rodriguez, Cruz, Stewart, Burgess, and Perry)

The bill creates the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program (program), to provide veterans and their families dedicated behavioral health care referral services, primarily for mental health and substance abuse. Through the program, a veteran may call a separate veteran-dedicated support line to receive assistance and support from a trained, fellow veteran.

The bill authorizes the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) to establish the program. If the FDVA does create the program, the FDVA may contract with a nonprofit entity that has statewide phone capacity and is accredited by both the Council on Accreditation and the National Alliance of Information and Referral Services. The contracting entity must enter into agreements with Florida 211 Network participants to provide services to veterans. In fulfilling an agreement, a 211 network participant may provide services in more than one geographic area under a single contract.

The bill models the program after the pilot program established in 2014 by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the FDVA in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee Counties.

The bill specifies goals, services, and follow-up requirements. In addition to mental health and substance abuse services, a goal of the program is to prevent suicides by veterans.

The FDVA must compile data collected by the Florida 211 Network into a report for the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2022.

If approved by the Governor, these provisions take effect July 1, 2021.

Vote: Senate 40-0; House 117-0