

1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to veterans; requiring school districts to
3 observe Veterans' Day and Veterans' Awareness Week;
4 providing requirements for such recognition; directing the
5 Department of Children and Family Services to establish up
6 to three pilot projects for the purpose of reducing
7 suicide among veterans and increasing access to services;
8 providing duties of the department; providing requirements
9 for the pilot project programs; requiring the Statewide
10 Office of Suicide Prevention, the Department of Veterans'
11 Affairs, and the Florida National Guard to enter into
12 partnerships with the pilot projects and community
13 providers to implement the initiative; requiring an
14 evaluation and a report to the Governor and Legislature;
15 providing for expiration of the pilot projects;
16 establishing a veterans' suicide prevention direct-support
17 organization answerable to the Statewide Office for
18 Suicide Prevention to assist with funding veterans'
19 suicide prevention initiatives; providing corporate
20 requirements; providing for a board of directors;
21 providing for a contract with the office and requirements
22 for the contract; authorizing the direct-support
23 organization to use the property, facilities, and
24 personnel services of the office; requiring the moneys of
25 the direct-support organization to be deposited in a
26 separate account in the name of the organization;
27 providing an effective date.
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29 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

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Section 1. Veterans' Awareness Week.--

(1) Each school district shall observe November 11 of each year as the Veterans' Day holiday and shall observe that week as Veterans' Awareness Week. In any year in which November 11 falls on a Saturday or Sunday, Veterans' Awareness Week shall be observed the week immediately preceding or following November 11, to coincide with the date on which Veterans' Day is observed as a federal holiday.

(2) During Veterans' Awareness Week, each school district shall provide programs that instruct students on the role of veterans in the history of our state and country and shall recognize the contributions made by veterans to our state and country. Programs, instruction, ceremonies, or any other events conducted as part of Veterans' Awareness Week are to be organized and presented at the discretion of each individual school district.

Section 2. Veterans' suicide prevention pilot projects.--

(1) PURPOSE.--The Department of Children and Family Services, subject to the availability of public or private funding, shall establish up to three pilot projects in the three areas of the state which have the largest concentration of veteran residents. The purpose of the projects is to reduce the incidence of suicide among veterans by increasing access to services and support for veterans and their families who may be in need of mental health services and who are not currently being served by the United States Department of Veterans

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57 Affairs.

58 (2) DEPARTMENT DUTIES.--The department shall work with the
59 Florida Certification Board to develop a new veteran-peer-
60 specialist credential and develop a statewide certification
61 process for certifying veteran peer specialists through the
62 Florida Certification Board in order to create a cadre of
63 certified specialists to assist in providing peer support for
64 veterans through the pilot projects.

65 (3) PILOT PROJECTS.--Each pilot project must:

66 (a) Develop a veteran-to-veteran peer support program that
67 reaches out to veterans on a continual basis by mail, e-mail,
68 telephone, or face-to-face contact in order to:

69 1. Reduce isolation and the risk of suicide through
70 regular and ongoing, long-term contact;

71 2. Conduct informal assessments to determine if a referral
72 is needed; and

73 3. Assist in connecting veterans to local resources.

74 (b) Conduct a needs assessment of local substance abuse
75 and mental health providers in the pilot project area to
76 determine if local providers are trained and able to meet the
77 specific needs of veterans and the increase in demand for
78 services.

79 (c) Establish a veterans information program at each pilot
80 project site to serve as a resource for student veterans and
81 college and university personnel serving student veterans. The
82 program must provide prevention education, as well as early
83 intervention and counseling, and assist student veterans who
84 have personal problems. The key components of the program

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85 include:

86 1. A faculty-training component under which project
87 personnel work with a faculty coordinator from each of the
88 colleges and universities in the pilot project area to provide
89 training on the symptoms and warning signs of suicide to faculty
90 members. The training must focus on the special circumstances
91 that are unique to this population, such as posttraumatic stress
92 disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and issues specific to
93 female veterans.

94 2. A component that disseminates information and provides
95 education for student veterans. The program must hold regular
96 education workshops for student veterans related to veterans
97 issues and stress factors that are experienced in an academic
98 setting. Printed literature that is specific to veterans shall
99 be disseminated regularly.

100 3. An outreach component under which program personnel
101 shall undertake outreach activities and engage and educate
102 student veterans, their families, and the community in order to
103 increase information on and access to services for veterans who
104 are at risk of suicide. Outreach activities include linkage with
105 service resources, dissemination of information, and education
106 to:

107 a. Increase public awareness about the unique needs of
108 veterans and the risks of suicide and warning signs of suicide
109 in veterans, without creating additional stigma.

110 b. Coordinate and train professionals who provide services
111 for at-risk veterans.

112 c. Identify available services and specialized assistance

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113 for veterans and family members.

114 d. Provide education on veterans' issues and trauma.

115 e. Mobilize a recovery-oriented system of care within the
116 community for at-risk veterans.

117 4. A component for responding to critical incidents, such
118 as traumatic death or medical crisis, campus violence, or other
119 incidents that may have a significant emotional impact on
120 student veterans. This includes providing trained debriefing
121 counselors, as well as group counseling for affected student
122 veterans and consultation services related to crisis management
123 and veterans.

124 (d) Work with community emergency response resources to
125 more effectively address crises involving veterans and their
126 families. This includes linking emergency responders to
127 veterans' resources and persons trained in veterans' issues.
128 Regular pilot staff shall be trained in dealing with emergency
129 referrals, including training in being able to differentiate
130 between the need for face-to-face intervention or phone
131 intervention. All staff shall be made aware of the necessity for
132 immediate documentation of all contacts inclusive of intentional
133 self-injurious behavior, statements of threat, written forms of
134 threat, extreme withdrawal, significant loss of appetite or
135 weight, and crisis warning signs unique to veterans. All
136 referrals in the areas served by the pilot projects must be
137 followed up with telephone contact and field-based intervention
138 services, if agreed to by the veteran or family member.

139 (e) Offer postdeployment reintegration sessions for
140 veterans who were deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom or

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141 Operation Enduring Freedom through community providers at 4, 6,
142 and 10 months after returning home to complement the
143 reintegration efforts overseen by the United States Department
144 of Defense. Because symptoms of stress and warning signs are
145 often delayed, continual contact over time is important. The
146 timing protocol for reintegration sessions may vary for each
147 pilot project in order to evaluate the effectiveness of
148 different models.

149 (4) OTHER AGENCIES.--The Statewide Office of Suicide
150 Prevention, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the Florida
151 National Guard shall enter into partnerships with the pilot
152 projects and community providers in order to implement this
153 initiative.

154 (5) EVALUATION.--The department, together with input from
155 each of the pilot projects, shall design an evaluation
156 methodology for measuring the efficacy of the pilot projects.
157 The evaluation shall be presented to the Governor, the President
158 of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives
159 by March 1, 2012. The evaluation must consider whether the pilot
160 projects have:

161 (a) Improved veteran access to community linkages and
162 resources, including primary care, behavioral health care
163 providers, and veterans' services, in order to provide needed
164 services and to help veterans be self-sufficient members of the
165 community.

166 (b) Educated, increased awareness of, and mobilized the
167 community about suicide as a public health problem, especially
168 as it relates to veterans.

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169 (c) Reduced the danger and incidence of suicide and self-
170 harm among veterans.

171 (d) Increased the likelihood of long-term community
172 commitment to providing support to veterans.

173 (6) EXPIRATION.--The pilot projects shall expire July 1,
174 2012.

175 Section 3. Veterans' suicide prevention direct-support
176 organization.--The Statewide Office for Suicide Prevention may
177 establish a direct-support organization to assist with securing
178 funding for veterans' suicide prevention and other suicide
179 prevention initiatives, including any pilot projects established
180 by the Department of Children and Family Services to reduce the
181 incidence of suicide among veterans.

182 (1) The direct-support organization must be:

183 (a) A not-for-profit Florida corporation, incorporated
184 under chapter 617, Florida Statutes, and approved by the
185 Secretary of State.

186 (b) Organized and operated exclusively to solicit funds;
187 request and receive grants, gifts, and bequests of money;
188 acquire, receive, hold, invest, and administer property and
189 funds in its own name; and make expenditures for the benefit of
190 the purposes specified in this section.

191 (c) Certified by the office, after review, to be operating
192 in a manner consistent with the goals of this section and in the
193 best interests of the state. Such certification must be made
194 annually and reported to the Office of Drug Control.

195 (2) The direct-support organization shall be governed by a
196 seven-member board of directors. The members of the board shall

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197 be appointed by the office, shall serve at the pleasure of the
198 office, and be appointed to terms that may not exceed 4 years.

199 (3) The direct-support organization shall operate under
200 written contract with the office. The contract must provide for:

201 (a) Approval of the articles of incorporation and bylaws
202 of the direct-support organization by the office.

203 (b) The fiscal year of the direct-support organization to
204 begin July 1 of each year and end June 30 of the following year.

205 (c) Submission of an annual budget for the approval of the
206 office.

207 (d) Any procedures or conditions with which the direct-
208 support organization must comply to use property, facilities, or
209 personnel services of the office and to meet the administrative
210 requirements of the office.

211 (e) The disclosure of the material provisions of the
212 contract and the distinction between the Office for Suicide
213 Prevention and the direct-support organization to donors of
214 gifts, contributions, or bequests and on all promotional and
215 fundraising publications.

216 (f) The reversion to the office or the state of moneys and
217 property held in trust by the direct-support organization if the
218 direct-support organization is no longer approved to operate or
219 ceases to exist.

220 (4) The office may authorize the use of its facilities and
221 property, other than money, to the direct-support organization
222 as well as personnel services. The term "personnel services"
223 includes full-time personnel and part-time personnel as well as
224 payroll processing.

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225 (5) Moneys of the direct-support organization shall be
226 held in a separate depository account in the name of the direct-
227 support organization and subject to the provisions of the
228 contract with the office. Such moneys may include membership
229 fees, private donations, income derived from fundraising
230 activities, and grants applied for and received by the direct-
231 support organization.

232 (6) The direct-support organization is subject to an
233 annual financial audit in accordance with s. 215.981, Florida
234 Statutes.

235 Section 4. This act shall take effect July 1, 2009.