

By Senator Deutch

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

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30 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

31
32 Section 1. Veterans' Appreciation Week.-

33 (1) Each school district shall observe November 11 of each
34 year as the Veterans' Day holiday and shall observe that week as
35 Veterans' Appreciation Week. In any year in which November 11
36 falls on a Saturday or Sunday, Veterans' Appreciation Week shall
37 be observed the week immediately preceding or following November
38 11, to coincide with the date that Veterans' Day is observed as
39 a federal holiday.

40 (2) During Veterans' Appreciation Week, the district shall
41 provide programs that instruct students on the role of veterans
42 in the history of our state and country and shall recognize the
43 contributions made by veterans to our state and country.

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

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

54 (2) DEPARTMENT DUTIES.-The department shall work with the
55 Florida Certification Board to develop a new veteran-peer-
56 specialist credential and develop a statewide certification
57 process for certifying veteran peer specialists through the
58 Florida Certification Board in order to create a cadre of

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59 certified specialists to assist in providing peer support for
60 veterans through the pilot projects.

61 (3) PILOT PROJECTS.—Each pilot project must:

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

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

67 2. Conduct informal assessments to determine if a referral
68 is needed; and

69 3. Assist in connecting veterans to local resources.

70 (b) Conduct a needs assessment of local substance abuse and
71 mental health providers in the pilot project area to determine
72 if local providers are trained and able to meet the specific
73 needs of veterans and the increase in demand for services.

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

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

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88 female veterans.

89 2. A component that disseminates information and provides
90 education for student veterans. The program must hold regular
91 educational workshops for student veterans related to veterans
92 issues and stresses that are experienced in an academic setting.
93 Printed literature that is specific to veterans shall be
94 disseminated regularly.

95 3. An outreach component under which program personnel
96 shall reach out, engage, and educate student veterans, their
97 families, and the community in order to increase information on
98 and access to services for veterans who are at risk of suicide.
99 Outreach activities include linkage with service resources,
100 dissemination of information, and education to:

101 a. Increase public awareness about the unique needs of
102 veterans and the risks of suicide and warning signs of suicide
103 in veterans, without creating additional stigma.

104 b. Coordinate and train professionals who provide services
105 for at-risk veterans.

106 c. Identify available services and specialized assistance
107 for veterans and family members.

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

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

111 4. A component for responding to critical incidents, such
112 as traumatic death or medical crisis, campus violence, or other
113 incidents that may have a significant emotional impact on
114 student veterans. This includes providing trained debriefing
115 counselors, as well as group counseling for affected student
116 veterans and consultation services related to crisis management

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117 and veterans.

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

133 (e) Offer postdeployment reintegration sessions for
134 veterans who were deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom or
135 Operation Enduring Freedom through community providers at 4, 6,
136 and 10 months after returning home to complement the
137 reintegration efforts that the United States Department of
138 Defense oversees. Because symptoms of stress and warning signs
139 are often delayed, continual contact over time is important. The
140 timing protocol for reintegration sessions may vary for each
141 pilot project in order to evaluate the effectiveness of
142 different models.

143 (4) OTHER AGENCIES.—The Statewide Office of Suicide
144 Prevention, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the Florida
145 National Guard shall enter into partnerships with the pilot

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146 projects and community providers in order to implement this
147 initiative.

148 (5) EVALUATION.—The department, together with input from
149 each of the pilot projects, shall design an evaluation
150 methodology for measuring the efficacy of the pilot projects.
151 The evaluation shall be presented to the Governor, the President
152 of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives
153 by March 1, 2012. The evaluation must consider whether the pilot
154 projects have:

155 (a) Improved veteran access to community linkages and
156 resources, including primary care, behavioral health care
157 providers, and veterans' services, in order to provide needed
158 services and to help veterans be self-sufficient members of the
159 community.

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

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

165 (d) Increased the likelihood of long-term community
166 commitment to providing veterans' support.

167 (8) EXPIRATION.—The pilot projects shall expire July 1,
168 2012.

169 Section 3. Veterans' suicide prevention direct-support
170 organization.—The Statewide Office for Suicide Prevention may
171 establish a direct-support organization to assist with securing
172 funding for veterans' suicide prevention and other suicide
173 prevention initiatives, including any pilot projects established
174 by the Department of Children and Family Services to reduce the

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175 incidence of suicide among veterans.

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

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

180 (b) Organized and operated exclusively to solicit funds;
181 request and receive grants, gifts, and bequests of money;
182 acquire, receive, hold, invest, and administer property and
183 funds in its own name; and make expenditures for the benefit of
184 the purposes specified by this section.

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

189 (2) The direct-support organization shall be governed by a
190 seven-member board of directors. The members of the board shall
191 be appointed by the office, shall serve at the pleasure of the
192 office, and be appointed to terms that may not exceed 4 years.

193 (3) The direct-support organization shall operate under
194 written contract with the commission. The contract must provide
195 for:

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

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

200 (c) Submission of an annual budget for the approval of the
201 office.

202 (d) Any procedures or conditions with which the direct-
203 support organization must comply to use property, facilities, or

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204 personnel services of the commission and to meet the
205 administrative requirements of the office.

206 (e) The disclosure of the material provisions of the
207 contract and the distinction between the Office for Suicide
208 Prevention and the direct-support organization to donors of
209 gifts, contributions, or bequests, as well as on all promotional
210 and fundraising publications.

211 (f) The reversion to the office or the state of moneys and
212 property held in trust by the direct-support organization if the
213 direct-support organization is no longer approved to operate or
214 ceases to exist.

215 (4) The office may authorize the use of its facilities and
216 property, other than money, to the direct-support organization
217 as well as personnel services. The term "personnel services"
218 includes full-time personnel and part-time personnel as well as
219 payroll processing.

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

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

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