

By the Committee on Military Affairs and Domestic Security; and  
Senator Deutch

583-03016-09

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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 Veterans' Day and shall observe that week as Veterans'  
35 Appreciation Week. In any year in which November 11 falls on a  
36 Saturday or Sunday, Veterans' Appreciation Week shall be  
37 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) Provide outreach in order to engage and educate  
63 veterans, their families, and the community in order to increase  
64 information on and access to services for veterans who are at  
65 risk of suicide. Outreach activities include linkage with  
66 service resources, dissemination of information, and education  
67 to:

68 1. Increase public awareness about the unique needs of  
69 veterans and the risks of suicide and warning signs of suicide  
70 in veterans, without creating additional stigma.

71 2. Coordinate and train professionals who provide services  
72 for at-risk veterans.

73 3. Identify available services and specialized assistance  
74 for veterans and family members.

75 4. Provide education on veterans' issues and trauma.

76 5. Mobilize a recovery-oriented system of care within the  
77 community for at-risk veterans.

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

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

83 2. Conduct informal assessments to determine if a referral  
84 is needed; and

85 3. Assist in connecting veterans to local resources.

86 (c) Conduct a needs assessment of local substance abuse and  
87 mental health providers in the pilot project area to determine

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88 if local providers are trained and able to meet the specific  
89 needs of veterans and the increase in demand for services.

90 (d) Work with community emergency response resources to  
91 more effectively address crisis involving veterans and their  
92 families. This includes linking emergency responders to  
93 veterans' resources and persons trained in veterans' issues.  
94 Regular pilot staff shall be trained on dealing with emergency  
95 referrals, including training in being able to differentiate  
96 between the need for face-to-face intervention or telephone  
97 intervention. All staff shall be made aware of the necessity for  
98 immediate documentation of all contacts inclusive of intentional  
99 self-injurious behavior, statements of threat, written forms of  
100 threat, extreme withdrawal, significant loss of appetite or  
101 weight, and crisis warning signs unique to veterans. All  
102 referrals in the areas served by the pilot projects must be  
103 followed up with telephone contact and field-based intervention  
104 services, if agreed to by the veteran or family member.

105 (e) Offer postdeployment reintegration sessions for  
106 veterans who were deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom or  
107 Operation Enduring Freedom through community providers at 4, 6,  
108 and 10 months after returning home to complement the  
109 reintegration efforts that the United States Department of  
110 Defense oversees. Because symptoms of stress and warning signs  
111 are often delayed, continual contact over time is important. The  
112 timing protocol for reintegration sessions may vary for each  
113 pilot project in order to evaluate the effectiveness of  
114 different models.

115 (f) Establish a veterans information program at each pilot  
116 project site to serve as a resource for student veterans and

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117 college and university personnel serving student veterans. The  
118 program must provide prevention education, as well as early  
119 intervention and counseling, and assist student veterans who  
120 have personal problems. The key components of the program  
121 include:

122 1. A faculty-training component under which project  
123 personnel work with a faculty coordinator from each of the  
124 colleges and universities in the pilot project area to provide  
125 training on the symptoms and warning signs of suicide to faculty  
126 members. The training must focus on the special circumstances  
127 that are unique to this population, such as posttraumatic stress  
128 disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and issues specific to  
129 female veterans.

130 2. A component that disseminates information and provides  
131 education for student veterans. The program must hold regular  
132 educational workshops for student veterans related to veterans  
133 issues and stresses that are experienced in an academic setting.  
134 Printed literature that is specific to veterans shall be  
135 disseminated regularly.

136 3. A component for responding to critical incidents, such  
137 as traumatic death or medical crisis, campus violence, or other  
138 incidents that may have a significant emotional impact on  
139 student veterans. This includes providing trained debriefing  
140 counselors, as well as group counseling for affected student  
141 veterans and consultation services related to crisis management  
142 and veterans.

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 (6) 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 for Suicide Prevention.

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 office. The contract must provide for:

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

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

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

201 (d) Any procedures or conditions with which the direct-  
202 support organization must comply to use property, facilities, or  
203 personnel services of the office and to meet the administrative

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204 requirements of the office.

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

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

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

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

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

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