

**The Florida Senate**  
**BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

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Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Children, Families, and Elder Affairs

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BILL: SB 1144

INTRODUCER: Senator Simpson

SUBJECT: Services for Veterans and Their Families

DATE: March 19, 2015      REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

|    | ANALYST | STAFF DIRECTOR | REFERENCE | ACTION           |
|----|---------|----------------|-----------|------------------|
| 1. | Hendon  | Hendon         | CF        | <b>Favorable</b> |
| 2. | _____   | _____          | MS        | _____            |
| 3. | _____   | _____          | AP        | _____            |

**I. Summary:**

SB 1144 establishes the Florida Veterans’ Care Coordination Program within the Department of Children and Families (DCF), to provide veterans and their families with behavioral health information and referral services. Behavioral health includes services for both mental health and substance abuse. The new program will be delivered through the Florida’s 211 Network and is based on a pilot project in central Florida. The bill has an appropriation of \$2 million for the program and has an effective date of July 1, 2015.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Florida 211 Network**

Many health and human services are available to the citizens of Florida. However, sometimes individuals are not aware of the available services. After the success of implementing 911 systems to obtain emergency assistance, communities began 211 networks for helping individuals obtain services. A 211 network is a telephone based service offered by nonprofit and public agencies throughout Florida and the United States. The 211 organizations provide free, confidential information and referral services (I&R). Trained professionals are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to help callers identify and connect with health and human service programs that can meet a variety of needs including food, housing, employment, health care, crisis counseling and more. Services are available statewide through any cell phone provider as well as through landlines in 58 of Florida’s 67 counties.<sup>1</sup>

At the community level, I&R services can also facilitate long-range planning by tracking requests for service and identifying gaps and duplications in services. Information and referral services also work with other human service organizations to make them a better resource for their clients. Professional information and referral specialists help people understand their problems and make informed decisions about possible solutions.<sup>2</sup> They may advocate on behalf

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services website, <http://flairs.org/index.htm>, (last visited Mar. 15, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

of those who need special support and reinforce the individual's capacity for self-reliance and self-determination through education, affirmation, collaborative planning and problem solving.

Section 408.918, F.S., establishes the Florida 211 Network and specifies certain requirements. The law requires that 211 providers must be fully accredited by the National Alliance of Information and Referral Services or be approved to operate by Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services. The law also designated the Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services as the state's 211 collaborative organization. The organization is responsible for designing, implementing, and coordinating the state's 211 providers. The purpose of this organization is to: 1) provide a state-wide mutual assistance network through educational and training opportunities among its membership pertaining to the delivery of information and referral and crisis support services, and 2) act as the Florida affiliate of the Alliance of Information and Referral Services in shaping, informing, and carrying out the national alliance's mission at the local and statewide levels to support the information and referral profession. The members of the alliance include representatives from general I&R's; specialized I&R's, such as elder helplines, child care resource and referral providers; crisis hotlines; and others who provide information services. The Florida alliance serves as the statewide mutual assistance network for its members. It also serves as the I&R education source.

### **Care for Veterans**

A person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable may qualify for veterans' affairs (VA) health care benefits. Reservists and National Guard members may also qualify for VA health care benefits if they were called to active duty by a federal order and completed the full period for which they were called or ordered to active duty.<sup>3</sup> VA health benefits include all the necessary inpatient hospital care and outpatient services to promote, preserve, or restore a veteran's health. VA medical facilities provide a wide range of services including traditional hospital-based services such as surgery, critical care, mental health, orthopedics, pharmacy, radiology and physical therapy. VA provides specialty inpatient and outpatient mental health services at its medical centers and community-based outpatient clinics, in addition, readjustment counseling services may be available at veteran centers across the nation.<sup>4</sup> The goal is to support recovery and enable veterans who experience mental health problems to live meaningful lives in their communities and to achieve their full potential.

In 1988, Florida citizens endorsed a constitutional amendment to create the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs as a separate agency charged with providing advocacy and representation for Florida's veterans and to intercede on their behalf with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.<sup>5</sup> The department assists veterans with their federal benefits, improves the quality of life for veterans with service-connected disabilities, and provides access to federally funded medical care for eligible veterans. The department reports that there are more than 1.5 million veterans in Florida.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors*, (last updated November 11, 2014) [http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits\\_book/benefits\\_chap01.asp](http://www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book/benefits_chap01.asp), (last visited Mar. 16, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Health Benefits*, (updated June 23, 2014) [http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/access/medical\\_benefits\\_package.asp](http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/access/medical_benefits_package.asp), (last visited Mar. 16, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Florida Department of Veterans Affairs website, <http://floridavets.org/about-us/>, (last visited Mar. 16, 2015).

The 2014 Florida Legislature appropriated \$150,000 to the Department of Veterans' Affairs to create a pilot project expanding existing 211 services to veterans in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Manatee counties.<sup>6</sup> In August 2014, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay expanded services to veterans and to date has served 98 veterans through care coordination. Veterans in care coordination receive ongoing suicide assessment, continuous safety planning and support for an extended period of time. The program aims to ensure veterans are not only receiving information on available services but, are also enrolled, accepted, and attending VA-funded and other community based services.

### III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

**Section 1** of the bill creates s. 394.9087, F.S. This new section within the chapter on community based substance abuse and mental health services creates the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program. The program is created within the DCF. The program must meet the requirements of Florida's 211 Network as specified in s. 408.913, F.S. The purpose of the program is to provide veterans and their families with behavioral health information and referral services. Behavioral health includes both mental health and substance abuse services. The department is directed to model the new Veterans' Care Coordination Program after a pilot program in central Florida conducted by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The bill sets out goals for the program to include:

- Prevent suicides among veterans;
- Increase the use of services; and
- Increase the level of federal Veterans Administration funding.

The bill requires the DCF to establish care coordination teams to implement the program statewide. The program is to provide information and referral services by expanding the services provided by the Florida 211 Network. The services must include:

- Peer support, crisis intervention and information and referral;
- Treatment coordination, including follow up care;
- Suicide assessment;
- Promotion of safety and wellness;
- Coordination of resources available to veterans; and
- Needs assessments, including safety planning.

The program must maintain records on the number of requests for services. The bill requires the program to follow up with veterans to see if they have acted on referrals for service and if they have received assistance. The program is required to develop communication strategies to inform veterans and their families of available services.

**Section 2** of the bill appropriates \$2 million in recurring general revenue funds to the DCF to implement the Veterans' Care Coordination Program.

**Section 3** provides an effective date of July 1, 2015.

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<sup>6</sup> Specific appropriation 595 of HB 5001, 2014-2015 General Appropriations Act

**IV. Constitutional Issues:**

## A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

## B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

## C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

**V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

## A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

## B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

## C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill appropriates \$2 million in recurring general revenue funds to the Department of Children and Families.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 394.9087 of the Florida Statutes.

**IX. Additional Information:**

## A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

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This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

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