

**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 128

INTRODUCER: Senator Simpson

SUBJECT: Services for Combat Veterans and Their Families

DATE: September 9, 2015

REVISED: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**I. Summary:**

SB 128 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. The new program will model the proof-of-concept pilot program begun in 2014 by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs. The program will be delivered through the Florida 211 Network. The bill appropriates \$2 million in recurring general revenue to DCF for the program and has an effective date of July 1, 2016.

**II. Present Situation:**

**Florida 211**

Section 408.918, F.S., establishes the Florida 211 Network, authorizing the planning, development, and implementation of a statewide network to serve as the single point of coordination for information and referral for health and human services.

A 211 network is a telephone-based service offered by nonprofit and public agencies throughout Florida and the United States that provide free, confidential information and referral services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The network helps 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.<sup>1</sup> In Florida, services are available statewide through any cell phone provider as well as through landlines in all 67 counties by dialing 2-1-1.<sup>2</sup> In order to participate in the Florida 211 Network, a 211 provider must be fully accredited by the National

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<sup>1</sup> Florida 2-1-1- Association, <http://www.211florida.org/> (last visited September 9, 2015).

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

Alliance of Information and Referral Services or have received approval to operate, pending accreditation, from its affiliate, the Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services.<sup>3</sup>

## **Veterans and Mental Health**

### ***Depression and Suicide Among Veterans***

According to a 2008 study, between 5 and 15 percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan returned with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and an additional 2 to 14 percent returned with major depression.<sup>4</sup> PTSD attributed to combat has affected between 2 and 17 percent of all U.S. military veterans since the Vietnam War.<sup>5</sup> In 2012, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) released a report detailing veteran deaths from suicide from 1999 to 2009.<sup>6</sup> Over that ten-year span, veterans comprised approximately 22.2% of all suicides. In 2010, on average, 22 veterans committed suicide per day.<sup>7</sup> In response to these trends, the federal government, through the USDVA, established programs to connect veterans to mental health services.

### ***Mental Health Services for Veterans***

For the purposes of USDVA health benefits and services, a person who served in the active military service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable is a veteran and may qualify for USDVA health care benefits.<sup>8</sup> Current and former reservists and National Guard members may also qualify for USDVA 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>9</sup>

The USDVA 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>10</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.

The Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) is a resource for veterans developed by the USDVA to connect veterans and current service members in crisis and their families and friends with information

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<sup>3</sup> Section 408.918(2), F.S.

<sup>4</sup> *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery*, at 433 (Terri Tanielian and Lisa H. Jaycox, Eds.) (2008), [http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND\\_MG720.pdf](http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2008/RAND_MG720.pdf), (last visited September 9, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Lisa K. Richardson, B. Christopher Frueh, and Ronald Acierno, *Prevalence Estimate of Combat-Related PTSD: A Critical Review*, 44 *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, at 4-19 (January 2010), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2891773/>, (last visited September 9, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> Janet Kemp and Robert Bossarte, *Suicide Data Report, 2012*, Department of Veterans Affairs Mental Health Services Suicide Prevention Program, at 15, <http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf>, (last visited September 9, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Benefits, Veterans Eligibility, <http://www.va.gov/healthbenefits/apply/veterans.asp>, (last visited September 9, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *Health Benefits* (2014), [http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/access/medical\\_benefits\\_package.asp](http://www.va.gov/HEALTHBENEFITS/access/medical_benefits_package.asp), (last visited September 9, 2015).

from qualified responders through a confidential, toll-free hotline, online chat, and text messaging service.<sup>11</sup> The VCL was launched in 2007 and over the course of the program has answered more than 1.6 million calls, engaged in more than 207,700 online chats, responded to more than 32,300 texts, and made more than 45,000 lifesaving rescues.<sup>12</sup> Over the span of the program the number of repeat callers has steadily increased, either reflecting a change in the type of help individuals are seeking or the expanding role the VCL is playing in the provision of mental health care for veterans.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay Pilot Project**

In 2014, the Legislature appropriated \$150,000 to the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) to create a pilot project expanding existing Florida 211 services to veterans in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk and Manatee counties.<sup>14</sup> In August 2014, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay expanded services to veterans through care coordination. Care coordination means veterans 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 community based services. During state fiscal year 2014-2015, the program handled 1,135 calls from veterans and made 925 referrals to community mental health agencies, the VA, and other providers for service.<sup>15</sup>

### **III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

The bill creates s. 394.9087, F.S., to establish the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program (program) within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The program must provide behavioral healthcare referral services to both veterans and their families based on the proof-of-concept pilot program conducted in 2014 by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the FDVA. Behavioral health includes services for both mental health and substance abuse. The bill sets out the goals for the program to include:

- Prevent suicides among veterans;
- Increase the use of services; and
- Increase the level of USDVA funding.

The bill requires the DCF to establish care coordination teams to implement the program and provide information and referral services by expanding the services provided by the Florida 211 Network. The program must also meet the requirements specified in s. 408.913, F.S. The services must include:

- Peer support, crisis intervention and information and referral;
- Treatment coordination, including follow up care;
- Suicide assessment;

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<sup>11</sup> Veterans Crisis Line, FAQs, <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/About/FAQs.aspx>, (last visited September 9, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Veterans Crisis Line, About the Veterans Crisis Line, <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/About/AboutVeteransCrisisLine.aspx>, (last visited September 9, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> Specific appropriation 595 of HB 5001, 2014-2015 General Appropriations Act

<sup>15</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, 2015 End of Year Synopsis, on file with the Committee on Children, Families and Elder Affairs.

- 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.

The bill appropriates \$2 million in recurring general revenue funds to DCF to implement the Veterans' Care Coordination Program in fiscal year 2016-2017.

The bill provides an effective date of July 1, 2016.

#### **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. The early treatment of veterans for behavioral health care would reduce costs to the local, state and federal government programs serving veterans.

#### **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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