

**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 260

INTRODUCER: Senator Harrell and others

SUBJECT: Services for Veterans and Their Families

DATE: March 1, 2021

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

	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1.	<u>Brown</u>	<u>Caldwell</u>	<u>MS</u>	<b>Favorable</b>
2.	<u>Delia</u>	<u>Cox</u>	<u>CF</u>	<b>Pre-meeting</b>
3.	_____	_____	<u>AP</u>	_____

**I. Summary:**

SB 260 creates the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program (Program), to provide veterans and their families dedicated behavioral health care referral services, primarily for mental health and substance abuse. Through the Program, a veteran may call a separate veteran-dedicated support line to receive assistance and support from a fellow veteran who is trained to respond to the calls for assistance.

The bill requires the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) to establish the Program. To provide services, the FDVA must contract with a nonprofit entity that has statewide phone capacity to serve veterans and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation and fully accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Services. The contracting entity must enter into agreements with Florida 211 Network participants to provide services to veterans.

The bill models the Program after the pilot program established in 2014 by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee Counties.

The bill specifies goals, services, and follow-up requirements.

The FDVA must compile data collected by the Florida 211 Network into a report for the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2022.

The FDVA provides that the bill may have a fiscal impact on state government. Current funding for the program is set to expire September 30, 2021. Should the funding not be extended, annual recurring costs to operate the statewide program have been estimated in previous years at \$2 million from General Revenue. See Section V. Fiscal Impact Statement.

The bill is effective July 1, 2021.

## II. Present Situation:

### Veterans and Mental Health and/or Substance Abuse

More than 1.5 million veterans currently live in Florida, making the state's veteran population the third largest nationally.<sup>1</sup> Veterans face unique challenges, and some struggle with mental health and substance abuse.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, including war or combat.<sup>2</sup>

The National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), lists the percentage of veterans with PTSD by service era:

- Between 11 and 20 percent of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom have PTSD in a given year.
- About 12 percent of veterans who served in the Gulf War have PTSD in a given year.
- About 15 percent of veterans of the Vietnam War were diagnosed with PTSD at the time of the most recent study in the late 1980's. However, it is estimated that about 30 percent of veterans of the Vietnam War have had PTSD in their lifetimes.<sup>3</sup>

A strong association exists between PTSD and substance use disorders (SUD) amongst veterans. Statistics show:

- More than two in 10 veterans with PTSD also have SUD;
- Almost one in three veterans seeking treatment for SUD also have PTSD;
- About one in 10 veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan seen at the VA have problems with alcohol or other drugs.<sup>4</sup>

Suicide rates for veterans continue to be a cause of national concern:

- More than 6,000 veterans committed suicide each year from 2008 to 2016.
- In 2016, the suicide rate was 1.5 times greater for veterans than for non-veteran adults, after adjusting for age and gender.<sup>5</sup>

From 2005 to 2016, the increase in suicide rate among veterans in Veterans Hospital Administration (VHA) care was lower than among veterans not in VHA care.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Our Veterans*, available at <http://floridavets.org/our-veterans/> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?*, available at <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> National Center for PTSD, U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, *How Common is PTSD in Veterans?*, available at [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common\\_veterans.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp) (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> National Center for PTSD, U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, *PTSD and Substance Abuse in Veterans*, available at [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/related/substance\\_abuse\\_vet.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/related/substance_abuse_vet.asp) (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, U.S. Dep't of Veterans Affairs, *VA National Suicide Data Report 2005-2016*, pg. 3, available at [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP\\_National\\_Suicide\\_Data\\_Report\\_2005-2016\\_508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP_National_Suicide_Data_Report_2005-2016_508.pdf) (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

## **Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services (FLAIRS)**

Each year, 16 million people in the United States call 2-1-1 for help with basic needs like food and shelter, and emergency needs, such as mental health, addiction, and suicide intervention.<sup>7</sup> The Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services (FLAIRS) is the 211 collaborative organization for the state responsible for designing, studying, and implementing the Florida 211 Network.<sup>8</sup> The mission of the FLAIRS is to strengthen the health and human service information and referral provider network in the state through advocacy, coordination, and education.<sup>9</sup>

The Florida 211 Network, established in s. 408.918, F.S., operates as the single point of coordination for information and referral of health and human services.<sup>10</sup> As of February 20, 2017, 22 Florida 211 Network providers operated across the state.<sup>11</sup>

To participate in the Florida 211 Network, a 211 provider must be fully accredited by the National Alliance of Information and Referral Services or have received approval to operate, pending accreditation from its affiliate, the FLAIRS.<sup>12</sup>

## **The Council on Accreditation**

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is an international accrediting entity that accredits private and public organizations and programs that provide human services.<sup>13</sup> The COA specifically accredits entities providing child welfare, behavioral health, and community-based social services.<sup>14</sup>

## **Pilot Program and Statewide Expansion**

### ***Pilot Program***

In 2014, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay launched a pilot program through its existing 211 Network to offer a separate dedicated phone line for state veterans in need of support. The Program expanded existing 211 services, including behavioral health care service referrals, to veterans in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee counties.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See The Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services (FLAIRS), *211 Counts.org*, available at <http://www.flairs.org/211counts/> (last visited Jan. 14, 2021). For a breakdown of needs by center on the FLAIRS website, see *What are the Most Pressing Needs for Your Community?*, available at <https://211counts.org/home/index> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> Section 408.918(3), F.S.

<sup>9</sup> The Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services (FLAIRS), *Mission*, available at <http://www.flairs.org/mission/> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Section 408.918(1), F.S.

<sup>11</sup> The Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services (FLAIRS), *Florida 2-1-1 Network Map*, available at <http://www.flairs.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2017/03/FL-211-providers-and-coverage-areas-022717.pdf> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> Section 408.918(2), F.S.; The full accreditation process requires a remote database review, consultation component, on-site review, and demonstration of a call handling component, as well as payment of a membership fee. <https://www.airs.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3286> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Council on Accreditation, *Home*, available at <http://coanet.org/home/> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>14</sup> Council on Accreditation, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://coanet.org/faq/> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Specific Appropriation 595, ch. 2014-51, L.O.F., available at <http://laws.flrules.org/2014/51> (last visited February 25, 2021).

Under the Crisis Center’s Peer-to-Peer Care Coordination model, callers to the support line talk to a fellow veteran who will provide emotional support and assistance and referral to VA and non-VA services, including for medical care, housing, counseling, legal, and employment assistance.<sup>16</sup>

### ***History of Funding for the Pilot Program***

Since the launch of the pilot program, funding has been provided as follows:

- 2014 - 2015: The 2014 Legislature provided an appropriation of \$150,000 in nonrecurring funds to the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay to create the pilot program. With the appropriation, in August 2014, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay expanded its services to veterans and hired veterans to answer crisis calls. The Crisis Center launched the Florida Veterans Support Line in November 2014. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has continued the annual appropriation of \$150,000 to continue the pilot program.<sup>17</sup>
- 2017 - 2018: The Legislature funded \$400,000 in nonrecurring dollars from general revenue through the FDVA for statewide expansion of the dedicated call line and a marketing campaign to inform the public about the call line. Funding was not allotted for statewide Peer-to-Peer Care Coordination.<sup>18</sup> To date, this was the last legislative appropriation provided.
- 2018 - 2019: The FDVA provided \$1 million in funding for the statewide program, including Peer-to-Peer Care Coordination. To ensure full statewide implementation, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) matched in full the FDVA’s funding through a federal grant.
- 2019 - 2020: The FDVA provided \$1 million in funding, matched in full by the DCF.
- 2020 - 2021: The FDVA provided \$1 million in funding, matched in full by the DCF.<sup>19</sup>

Both of the sources of funding provided for the last three fiscal years are set to expire September 30, 2021, though may possible be extended to September 2024, pending funding allocation.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Use of the Program by Veterans***

Since the Crisis Center implemented the pilot program in 2014, veteran and veteran family participation has steadily increased.

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<sup>16</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Florida Veterans Support Line, What we offer*, available at <https://www.myflvet.com/about-1> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>17</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Overview of Current Funding* (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*, The nonrecurring \$400,000 is provided in Specific Appropriation 575 of ch. 2017-70, L.O.F., available at <http://laws.flrules.org/2017/70> (last visited February 25, 2021).

<sup>19</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *supra* note 16; Department of Veterans Affairs, *2021 Agency Legislative Bill Analysis, SB 260, See p. 2.* (Jan. 25, 2021) (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security) (hereinafter cited as “FDVA Analysis”).

<sup>20</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Florida Veterans Support Line, Current Funding* (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

Region Served	Fiscal Year	Veterans Served	Services Referred	Suicide Concerns	Peer-to-Peer Care Coordination - Crisis Center of Tampa Bay Only
5 Counties	2014-2015	1,135	925	179	626 <sup>21</sup>
5 Counties	2015-2016	1,315	1,478	207	750 <sup>22</sup>
5 Counties	2016-2017	3,420	3,641	538	768 <sup>23</sup>
Statewide	2017-2018	28,962	49,932	396 <sup>24</sup>	880 <sup>25</sup>
Statewide	2018-2019	17,699	35,150	431	2,274 <sup>26</sup>
Statewide	2019-2020	25,800	55,012	201	5,639 <sup>27</sup>
Statewide	2020-2021	6,890	19,707	67	1,658 <sup>28</sup>

**III. Effect of Proposed Changes:**

SB 260 creates the Florida Veterans’ Care Coordination Program (Program) as a statewide program, to provide veterans and their families dedicated behavioral health care referral services, primarily for mental health and substance abuse. Through the Program, a veteran who calls a dedicated support line receives assistance and support from a trained fellow veteran.

The bill requires the Florida Department of Veterans’ Affairs (FDVA) to establish the Program. To provide services, the FDVA must contract with a nonprofit entity that has statewide phone capacity to serve veterans and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation and fully accredited by the National Alliance of Information and Referral Services. The entity must enter into agreements with Florida 211 Network participants to provide services to veterans.

The bill models the Program after the pilot program established in 2014 by the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay and the FDVA in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee Counties.

**Program Goals and Services**

Program goals are to prevent suicide by a veteran and increase veteran participation in programs and services provided by the VA and community-based programs and services.

Florida 211 Network participants in the Program must provide an array of specific services, including all of the following:

<sup>21</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Overview of the 1-844-MYFLVET Support Line* (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> This number is reflected for the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay only.

<sup>25</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Overview of the 1-844-MYFLVET Support Line* (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

<sup>26</sup> Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Florida Veterans Support Line, Statewide Data, Fiscal Year 2019, Fiscal Year 2020, Fiscal Year 2021 - Q1* (on file with the Senate Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs, Space, and Domestic Security).

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* The totals for the most recent fiscal year reflect the first quarter of the 2020-2021 fiscal year, October through December 2020.

- Telephonic peer support, crisis intervention, and information on referral resources;
- Treatment coordination, including coordination of follow-up care;
- Assessment of suicide risk
- Immediate needs assessments, including safety planning and support;
- Promotion of the safety and wellness of veterans and their families, including continuous safety planning and support; and
- Resource coordination, including data analysis, to facilitate acceptance, enrollment, and attendance of veterans and their families in programs and services provided by the VA and other available community-based programs and services.

The bill requires program teams to:

- Document all incoming calls and capture data needed to reach a greater number of veterans and their families;
- Track the number and nature of requests from veterans and family members;
- Follow up with callers to determine if they have pursued referrals and whether additional help is needed; and
- Implement communication strategies<sup>29</sup> to educate veterans and their families about programs and services provided by the VA and other community-based programs and services.

To educate others about the Program:

- Florida 211 network participants must collect data on the program and establish and maintain a database of services available locally.
- Both the FDVA and its contractor must work with managing entities to educate service providers about the Florida Veterans Support Line and the Program.

### **Data Collection and Report**

Florida 211 Network participants must provide all collected data to the FDVA, as directed by the FDVA. By December 15, 2022, the FDVA must then submit a report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The report must include:

- The total number of calls received by the Program;
- Demographic information on each caller, including military affiliation, veteran status, and whether they are receiving services provided by the VA or other available community-based programs and services;
- The nature of each call, including any concerns prompting the call and any services requested by the caller;
- The outcome of each call, including referrals for services and any organizations to which the caller was referred;
- Services received as a result of each call;
- Information regarding follow-up by the Program team, including the percentage of calls receiving follow-up and the outcome of such follow-up;

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<sup>29</sup> Examples of communication strategies provided by the bill include media promotions, public service announcements, print and Internet articles, and community presentations.

- Information regarding the Program's impact on each caller's quality of life and avoidance of negative outcomes; and
- Each caller's level of satisfaction with services received.

Although the bill may have a fiscal impact on state government, the bill does not provide for funding.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2021.

#### **IV. Constitutional Issues:**

##### **A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:**

The bill does not appear to require cities and counties to expend funds or limit their authority to raise revenue or receive state-shared revenues as specified by Article VII, Section 18 of the Florida Constitution.

##### **B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:**

None.

##### **C. Trust Funds Restrictions:**

None.

##### **D. State Tax or Fee Increases:**

None.

##### **E. Other Constitutional Issues:**

None identified.

#### **V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**

##### **A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

##### **B. Private Sector Impact:**

Veterans and their families may financially benefit from having greater access to treatments and services specifically designed for veterans with mental health or substance abuse issues, including programs offered through the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and community-based services.

**C. Government Sector Impact:**

The bill requires the FDVA to provide statewide dedicated behavioral healthcare referral services, as well as mental health and substance abuse services to veterans and their families through Florida's 211 Network. According to the FDVA, funding was provided last year through the Department of Children and Families Opioid Grant that provides \$1,000,000 for two years. Additionally, the VA Sunshine Healthcare Network<sup>30</sup> matched the grant funding with \$1,000,000 for three years, with an option for another two years. Both sources of funding are scheduled to expire September 30, 2021, unless extended.<sup>31</sup> The cost of the program is unknown but legislation<sup>32</sup> filed in the 2019 session provided an appropriation of \$2 million.

**VI. Technical Deficiencies:**

None.

**VII. Related Issues:**

None.

**VIII. Statutes Affected:**

This bill creates section 394.9087, 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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<sup>30</sup> The VA Sunshine Healthcare Network provides a variety of medical services to veterans through an expansive regional coverage, including Florida; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *VISN 8 Clinical Contact Center – 24/7 Virtual Urgent Care*, available at: <https://www.visn8.va.gov/ccp.asp> (last visited Jan. 28, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> FDVA Analysis, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> SB 1222/HB365 (2019 Reg. Session).