

By Senator Wright

8-00982-24

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1 A bill to be entitled
2 An act relating to veterans' assistance; creating s.
3 295.235, F.S.; requiring the Department of Veterans'
4 Affairs, subject to appropriation, to expand outreach
5 programs connecting veterans, families, and their
6 survivors to certain services, benefits, and support;
7 requiring the department to host public events for
8 such purpose; requiring the department to submit an
9 annual report to the Governor and the Legislature
10 which contains specified information; providing an
11 effective date.

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13 WHEREAS, the State of Florida offers the nearly 1.5 million
14 veterans residing in this state unique benefits, such as in-
15 state tuition rates for veterans and their families using the
16 Post-9/11 GI Bill, several layers of property tax exemptions,
17 and expanded veterans' preference, including extensive benefits
18 and licensure and fee waivers, for many activities and
19 occupations, and

20 WHEREAS, veterans' benefits and services provided by the
21 State of Florida are meant to complement and augment available
22 federal programs to avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary
23 state expense for a federally funded service or benefit, and

24 WHEREAS, with only 749,000 Florida veterans enrolled in
25 earned health care services from the United States Department of
26 Veterans Affairs, hundreds of thousands of the state's veterans
27 and their families are not taking advantage of earned federal,
28 state, and local services, benefits, and support, and

29 WHEREAS, while Department of Veterans' Affairs veterans'

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30 claims examiners assisted more than 272,000 veterans in
31 providing information and counsel on earned services, benefits,
32 and support by the end of fiscal year 2022, additional available
33 federal dollars for Florida veterans remain untouched due to a
34 lack of awareness of their availability, and

35 WHEREAS, a corresponding increase in the quality and
36 quantity of outreach opportunities linking veterans to earned
37 benefits through the Department of Veterans' Affairs will not
38 only increase the quality of life of Florida veterans and their
39 families, but provide additional federal dollars to bolster
40 local economies, NOW, THEREFORE,

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

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44 Section 1. Section 295.235, Florida Statutes, is created to
45 read:

46 295.235 Funds for promoting veteran assistance.-

47 (1) Subject to the annual appropriation of \$500,000 by the
48 Legislature, the Department of Veterans' Affairs shall enhance
49 and expand its Internet-based, mobile application, print, social
50 media, and in-person outreach programs through various means for
51 the purpose of connecting veterans and their families or
52 survivors with earned services, benefits, and support beyond
53 existing underfunded efforts.

54 (2) The department shall use such funds to host at least
55 two public events each year to disseminate information to in-
56 person and virtual attendees regarding benefits and services
57 available to veterans, including, but not limited to,
58 educational, medical, insurance, and disability benefits.

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59 (3) The department shall submit an annual report to the
60 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the
61 House of Representatives which includes the number of public
62 events hosted by the department under this section, the number
63 of attendees at each such event, and any other information
64 deemed necessary by the department.

65 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2024.