

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 programs
5 connecting veterans and their families and survivors
6 to certain services, benefits, and support; requiring
7 the department to host public events for such purpose;
8 requiring a report to the Governor and Legislature;
9 providing an effective date.

10
11 WHEREAS, Florida offers its population of almost 1.5
12 million veterans unique benefits, such as in-state tuition rates
13 for veterans and their families using the Post-9/11 GI Bill,
14 several layers of property tax exemptions, and expanded
15 veterans' preference, including extensive benefits and licensure
16 and fee waivers, for many activities and occupations, and

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

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

26 WHEREAS, while Department of Veterans' Affairs veterans'
 27 claims examiners assisted more than 272,000 veterans in
 28 providing information and counsel on earned services, benefits,
 29 and support by the end of fiscal year 2022, additional federal
 30 dollars for Florida veterans remain untouched due to a lack of
 31 awareness, and

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

38
 39 Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

40
 41 Section 1. Section 295.235, Florida Statutes, is created
 42 to read:

43 295.235 Funds for promoting veteran assistance.—

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

HB 507

2024

51 (2) Using appropriated funds, the department must host at
52 least two public events each year to disseminate information to
53 in-person and virtual attendees regarding benefits and services
54 available to veterans, including, but not limited to,
55 educational, medical, insurance, and disability benefits.

56 (3) The department must submit an annual report to the
57 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the
58 House of Representatives which includes the number of public
59 events hosted by the department, the number of attendees at each
60 such event, and any other information deemed necessary by the
61 department.

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