

By Senator Wright

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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 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 the department to submit an annual report to
9 the Governor and Legislature; providing an effective
10 date.

11
12 WHEREAS, Florida offers its population of 1.4 million
13 veterans unique benefits, such as in-state tuition rates for
14 veterans and their families using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, several
15 layers of property tax exemptions, and expanded veterans'
16 preference, including extensive benefits and licensure and fee
17 waivers, for many activities and occupations, and

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

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

27 WHEREAS, while Department of Veterans' Affairs veterans'
28 claims examiners assisted more than 245,000 veterans in
29 providing information and counsel on earned services, benefits,

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30 and support by the end of fiscal year 2024, additional federal
31 dollars for Florida veterans remain untouched due to a lack of
32 awareness, and

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

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

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

44 295.235 Funds for promoting veteran assistance.-

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

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

57 (3) The department must submit an annual report to the
58 Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the

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59 House of Representatives which includes the number of public
60 events hosted by the department, the number of attendees at each
61 such event, and any other information deemed necessary by the
62 department.

63 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.