

AN ACT concerning State government.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 5. The Department of Veterans Affairs Act is amended by adding Section 2h as follows:

(20 ILCS 2805/2h new)

Sec. 2h. Task Force on Veterans' Suicide recommendations.
The provisions of this Section are based on the recommendations
in the final report of the Task Force on Veterans' Suicide,
published on December 1, 2016. The Department shall adopt any
rules necessary to implement this Section. The Department shall
seek available federal funding, grants, or private funding to
help fund the requirements of this Section; or the Department
shall collaborate with other departments, existing veterans'
organizations, nonprofit organizations, or private
organizations to implement the requirements of this Section.

(1) The Department shall reach out and coordinate with
the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs in order
to identify veterans returning from service in combat
units. The Department shall establish a proactive outreach
program for veterans that served in combat units.

(2) The Department or the Department in collaboration
with not-for-profit organizations shall engage in a public

awareness campaign concerning the trauma and internal injuries suffered by veterans in order to promote understanding and acceptance from the general public. The public awareness campaign shall work to dispel the myths associated with grieving, suicide, and mental health healing. The Department shall evaluate existing programs, including, but not limited to, the Suicide Prevention Alliance under the Suicide Prevention, Education, and Treatment Act, and coordinate messaging using messaging guidelines that existing programs have found to be successful.

(3) The Department shall provide training to frontline employees at veterans service organizations established under this Act on mental health services to identify veterans who might be at risk of suicidal thoughts. This training may include, but not be limited to, mental health first aid training and amplified suicide advanced training programs. The Department shall provide assistance to Veterans Assistance Commissions established under Section 9 of the Military Veterans Assistance Act and veterans' service associations, including, but not limited to, the American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and AMVETS, in providing the training under this paragraph to the employees of the Veterans Assistance Commissions and veterans' service associations that seek participation in the Department's training events.

The Department shall have priority for hiring combat veterans to serve as veteran service officers at veterans service organizations established under this Act for the purpose of having veteran services officers who are able to properly relate to fellow combat veterans.

(4) The Department shall collaborate with institutions of higher education to address environmental factors that could negatively impact a veteran's ability to learn in a traditional classroom setting. The Department, in coordination with institutions of higher education, shall provide proactive outreach as part of an educational success program for veterans experiencing difficulties in higher education.

(5) The Department shall coordinate with existing veterans' associations and military organizations to provide a family preparation course concerning the emotional cycle of deployment that is designed to help a family unit adjust to changes in discharged and returning veterans and inform the family members of where to go to seek assistance. This course shall be made available to the family of a veteran prior to the discharge and homecoming of the veteran.

(6) The Department shall reach out to the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs to obtain information on returning veterans and develop a transition program for returning veterans that reside in the State including

information on local organizations that provide resources or services for veterans that a veteran can access.

(7) The Department shall collaborate with non-profits, businesses, and employers in the State that focus on the needs of employees who are veterans seeking employment and that support employees who are veterans.

(8) The Department, in collaboration with veterans' organizations in the State, shall coordinate with the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs to promote their peer specialist program and collaborate with outside programs to establish a peer-to-peer program.