



## 100TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### State of Illinois

2017 and 2018

HB2647

by Rep. Stephanie A. Kifowit

#### SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

20 ILCS 2805/2h new

Amends the Department of Veterans Affairs Act. Contains provisions concerning the establishment of various programs and services for the benefit of veterans including a proactive outreach program for veterans that served in high casualty units, in units that experienced high conflict areas, and in units where at least one service member committed suicide following his or her service; a public awareness campaign concerning the trauma and internal injuries suffered by veterans; specified training concerning mental health services for employees of veterans service organizations, Veterans Assistance Commissions, and veterans' service associations; educational success programs for veterans experiencing specified difficulties in higher education; a family preparation course for the families of returning veterans; a licensing program for therapy dogs for veterans; a transition program for returning veterans that reside in the State; a system that allows veterans to file a specified federal form immediately upon discharge; creation of an employer training program; and a standard statewide peer-to-peer training program to familiarize veterans with the veterans' services available at the local, State, and federal levels. Requires the Department of Veterans' Affairs to adopt any rules necessary to implement these provisions.

LRB100 08180 MJP 18276 b

FISCAL NOTE ACT  
MAY APPLY

A BILL FOR

1 AN ACT concerning State government.

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

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

6 (20 ILCS 2805/2h new)

7 Sec. 2h. Task Force on Veterans' Suicide recommendations.

8 The provisions of this Section are based on the recommendations  
9 in the final report of the Task Force on Veterans' Suicide,  
10 published on December 30, 2016. The Department shall adopt any  
11 rules necessary to implement this Section.

12 (1) The Department shall reach out to the United States  
13 Department of Defense in order to identify veterans  
14 returning from service in heavy casualty units, units that  
15 experienced high conflict areas, or units where at least  
16 one service member committed suicide following his or her  
17 service. The Department shall establish a proactive  
18 outreach program for veterans that served in high casualty  
19 units, in units that experienced high conflict areas, and  
20 in units where at least one service member committed  
21 suicide following his or her service.

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

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

12 (3) The Department shall provide training to frontline  
13 employees at veterans service organizations established  
14 under this Act on mental health services to identify  
15 veterans who might be at risk of suicidal thoughts. This  
16 training may include, but not be limited to, mental health  
17 first aid training and amplified suicide advanced training  
18 programs. The Department shall provide assistance to  
19 Veterans Assistance Commissions established under Section  
20 9 of the Military Veterans Assistance Act and veterans'  
21 service associations, including, but not limited to, the  
22 American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and AMVETS, in  
23 providing the training under this paragraph to the  
24 employees of the Veterans Assistance Commissions and  
25 veterans' service associations.

26 The Department shall find combat veterans to serve as

1 veteran service officers at veterans service organizations  
2 established under this Act for the purpose of having  
3 veteran services officers who are able to properly relate  
4 to fellow combat veterans.

5 (4) The Department shall collaborate with institutions  
6 of higher education to address environmental factors that  
7 could negatively impact a veteran's ability to learn in a  
8 traditional classroom setting. Such factors include, but  
9 are not limited to, expanding veterans' access to online  
10 learning; desk placement away from windows, crowded  
11 hallways, or orientation; grouping veterans together in a  
12 class; and veterans' only instructional periods. The  
13 Department, in coordination with institutions of higher  
14 education, shall provide proactive outreach as part of an  
15 educational success program for veterans experiencing  
16 difficulties in higher education due to undiagnosed mental  
17 health issues that prevent them from succeeding.

18 (5) The Department shall provide a family preparation  
19 course concerning the emotional cycle of deployment that is  
20 designed to help a family unit adjust to changes in  
21 discharged and returning veterans and inform the family  
22 members of where to go to seek assistance. This course  
23 shall be made available to the family of a veteran prior to  
24 the discharge and homecoming of the veteran.

25 (6) The Department shall develop a licensing program  
26 for therapy dogs, with a possible extension to other

1 therapy animals, for veterans. The Department shall  
2 develop standards for the training and identification of  
3 therapy dogs for veterans. The designation of therapy dog  
4 under this paragraph shall not qualify the dog to be a  
5 service animal as provided under any other Act in this  
6 State.

7 (7) The Department shall reach out to the United States  
8 Department of Defense to obtain information on returning  
9 veterans and develop a transition program for returning  
10 veterans that reside in the State. The program developed  
11 under this paragraph shall include a veteran-to-veteran  
12 connection program and information on local organizations  
13 that provide resources or services for veterans that a  
14 veteran can access.

15 (8) The Department shall reach out to the United States  
16 Department of Defense in order to develop a system that  
17 allows veterans to file a federal DD Form 214 immediately  
18 upon discharge.

19 (9) The Department shall collaborate with chambers of  
20 commerce in the State to create an employer training  
21 program that focuses on the needs of employees that are  
22 veterans. The Department shall develop a program that  
23 identifies companies that are trained on the circumstances  
24 that are unique to veterans seeking employment and that  
25 support employees that are veterans.

26 (10) The Department, in collaboration with veterans'

1       organizations in the State, shall establish a standard  
2       statewide peer-to-peer training program to familiarize  
3       veterans with the veterans' services available at the  
4       local, State, and federal levels.