

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 1, 2016. The Department shall adopt any  
11 rules necessary to implement this Section. The Department shall  
12 seek available federal funding, grants, or private funding to  
13 help fund the requirements of this Section; or the Department  
14 shall collaborate with other departments, existing veterans'  
15 organizations, nonprofit organizations, or private  
16 organizations to implement the requirements of this Section.

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

1 units, in units that experienced high conflict areas, and  
2 in units where at least one service member committed  
3 suicide following his or her service.

4 (2) The Department or the Department in collaboration  
5 with not-for-profit organizations shall engage in a public  
6 awareness campaign concerning the trauma and internal  
7 injuries suffered by veterans in order to promote  
8 understanding and acceptance from the general public. The  
9 public awareness campaign shall work to dispel the myths  
10 associated with grieving, suicide, and mental health  
11 healing. The Department shall evaluate existing programs,  
12 including, but not limited to, the Suicide Prevention  
13 Alliance under the Suicide Prevention, Education, and  
14 Treatment Act, and coordinate messaging using messaging  
15 guidelines that existing programs have found to be  
16 successful.

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

1 American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and AMVETS, in  
2 providing the training under this paragraph to the  
3 employees of the Veterans Assistance Commissions and  
4 veterans' service associations.

5 The Department shall hire combat veterans to serve as  
6 veteran service officers at veterans service organizations  
7 established under this Act for the purpose of having  
8 veteran services officers who are able to properly relate  
9 to fellow combat veterans.

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

23 (5) The Department shall provide a family preparation  
24 course concerning the emotional cycle of deployment that is  
25 designed to help a family unit adjust to changes in  
26 discharged and returning veterans and inform the family

1 members of where to go to seek assistance. This course  
2 shall be made available to the family of a veteran prior to  
3 the discharge and homecoming of the veteran.

4 (6) The Department shall develop a licensing program  
5 for therapy dogs, with a possible extension to other  
6 therapy animals, for veterans. The Department shall  
7 develop standards for the training and identification of  
8 therapy dogs for veterans. The designation of therapy dog  
9 under this paragraph shall not qualify the dog to be a  
10 service animal as provided under any other Act in this  
11 State.

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

20 (8) The Department shall reach out to the United States  
21 Department of Defense in order to develop a system that  
22 allows veterans to file a federal DD Form 214 immediately  
23 upon discharge.

24 (9) The Department shall collaborate with chambers of  
25 commerce in the State to create an employer training  
26 program that focuses on the needs of employees that are

1 veterans. The Department shall develop a program that  
2 identifies companies that are trained on the circumstances  
3 that are unique to veterans seeking employment and that  
4 support employees that are veterans.

5 (10) The Department, in collaboration with veterans'  
6 organizations in the State, shall establish a standard  
7 statewide peer-to-peer training program to familiarize  
8 veterans with the veterans' services available at the  
9 local, State, and federal levels.