

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 and coordinate with
18 the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs in order
19 to identify veterans returning from service in combat
20 units. The Department shall establish a proactive outreach
21 program for veterans that served in combat units.

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 that seek participation in
26 the Department's training events.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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