

1 AN ACT concerning veterans.

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

4 Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the
5 Veterans Suicide Prevention Commission Act.

6 Section 5. Findings. The General Assembly finds the
7 following:

8 (1) One of the highest priorities and moral duties
9 Illinoisans can undertake is to support those Illinois
10 citizens who have served or are serving our country and
11 State in the United States Armed Forces. Their military
12 service is recognized whether they served on active duty,
13 in the reserves, or as a member of the Illinois National
14 Guard, or have retired. The families of service members
15 are equally recognized.

16 (2) The General Assembly is committed to the members
17 of our military community, and to strengthening their
18 systems of care and supports in a manner that is
19 responsive to their needs by building upon existing
20 collaborations and resources.

21 (3) There are more than 2,000,000 members of the
22 Illinois military community representing about 16% of the
23 Illinois population.

1 (4) Illinois ranks high among the states in the nation
2 with over 40,000 military personnel who have been deployed
3 to support recent conflicts and overseas contingency
4 operations.

5 (5) Illinois service members have given the full
6 measure with the loss of their lives while serving their
7 country and State.

8 (6) Illinois service members have returned home with
9 battle wounds from serving their country and State that
10 are both external and internal.

11 (7) Unprecedented numbers of Illinois' service members
12 have or are experiencing multiple deployments to the
13 active theaters of war, separating them from family,
14 community, and traditional supports for extended periods
15 of time.

16 (8) Service members and their families often endure
17 extended periods of adjustment when faced with physical
18 and psychological disabilities, including post-traumatic
19 stress and traumatic brain injuries, and other
20 debilitating health conditions that pose long-standing
21 challenges for our veterans and their families and for our
22 State.

23 (9) State and local elected officials, including State
24 agency heads, State legislators, and representatives of
25 federal agencies, have a shared responsibility for
26 providing services and support to our military community.

1 (10) Meeting the needs of the military community is
2 not the sole responsibility of one agency or entity, but a
3 collective responsibility of the entire State that
4 requires a high level of collaboration and cooperation
5 between key stakeholders.

6 (11) Other non-government members of our State are
7 integral to the systems of care and supports for the
8 military community, including military and veterans
9 service and advocacy organizations that strive to address
10 the unique challenges faced by this population such as
11 behavioral health issues of mental illness and substance
12 use disorders, serious physical injury, employment,
13 education, and housing.

14 (12) A unified, seamless, and systematic method of
15 accessing services for those who have served our country
16 and our State is needed, particularly in the areas of
17 behavioral health issues of mental illness and substance
18 use disorders, serious physical injury, employment,
19 education, homelessness and housing, and legal assistance.

20 (13) The Illinois Joining Forces Foundation was
21 created by Public Act 98-986 to serve and ensure the
22 long-term sustainability of Illinois Joining Forces, a
23 public-private network of military and veteran-serving
24 organizations critically important for the support of the
25 State's military community.

26 (14) A Veterans Suicide Prevention Commission to plan

1 and coordinate the work of State agencies is needed to
2 develop systems of services and supports that reflect a
3 coordinated collective community approach to serve our
4 military community.

5 Section 10. Commission; purpose. The Veterans Suicide
6 Prevention Commission is created. The Commission shall drive
7 the State's strategic vision for assessing and achieving the
8 successful transition, adjustment, and reintegration of
9 service members of the armed forces, veterans, and their
10 families through the coordination of the collective efforts of
11 public and private organizations throughout the State. The
12 Commission shall facilitate, collaborate, and coordinate the
13 efforts of these organizations to effectively and responsively
14 meet the needs of the military community. In performing these
15 responsibilities, the Commission shall conduct planning,
16 research, education, training, and evaluation activities to
17 improve the operations and coordination of the systems of care
18 and supports. The Commission shall coordinate its activities
19 with those of Illinois Joining Forces and other advocacy
20 organizations for service members of the armed forces,
21 veterans, and their families for the purpose of preventing
22 veteran suicide.

23 Section 15. Composition.

24 (a) The Commission shall consist of the following members:

1 (1) The Governor or his or her designee, who shall
2 serve as Chairperson.

3 (2) The Directors of Military Affairs and Veterans'
4 Affairs or their designees, who shall serve as co-vice
5 chairs.

6 (3) The Lieutenant Governor or his or her designee.

7 (4) The Deputy Governor of Health and Human Services,
8 or the equivalent position if there is no Deputy Governor,
9 or his or her designee.

10 (5) One member appointed by the President of the
11 Senate.

12 (6) One member appointed by the Minority Leader of the
13 Senate.

14 (7) One member appointed by the Speaker of the House
15 of Representatives.

16 (8) One member appointed by the Minority Leader of the
17 House of Representatives.

18 (9) The Secretary of State or his or her designee.

19 (10) The Attorney General or his or her designee.

20 (11) The Treasurer or his or her designee.

21 (12) The Comptroller or his or her designee.

22 (13) The State Superintendent of Education or his or
23 her designee.

24 (14) The Executive Director of the Illinois Board of
25 Higher Education or his or her designee.

26 (15) The Chief Justice of the Illinois Supreme Court

1 or his or her designee.

2 (16) The Director of Aging or his or her designee.

3 (17) The Director of Agriculture or his or her
4 designee.

5 (18) The Director of Central Management Services or
6 his or her designee.

7 (19) The Director of Children and Family Services or
8 his or her designee.

9 (20) The Director of Commerce and Economic Opportunity
10 or his or her designee.

11 (21) The Director of Corrections or his or her
12 designee.

13 (22) The Director of Employment Security or his or her
14 designee.

15 (23) The Director of the Division of Mental Health or
16 his or her designee.

17 (24) The Secretary of Financial and Professional
18 Regulation or his or her designee.

19 (25) The Director of Healthcare and Family Services or
20 his or her designee.

21 (26) The Director of Human Rights or his or her
22 designee.

23 (27) The Secretary of Human Services or his or her
24 designee.

25 (28) The Secretary of Innovation and Technology or his
26 or her designee.

1 (29) The Director of Insurance or his or her designee.

2 (30) The Director of Labor or his or her designee.

3 (31) The Director of Natural Resources or his or her
4 designee.

5 (32) The Director of Public Health or his or her
6 designee.

7 (33) The Director of Revenue or his or her designee.

8 (34) The Chairperson of the Illinois Joining Forces
9 Board or his or her designee.

10 (35) One member designated by Illinois Joining Forces.

11 (b) As necessary, the Commission may appoint by majority
12 vote individuals representing the following:

13 (1) The Illinois Army National Guard.

14 (2) The Illinois Air National Guard.

15 (3) The United States Army or United States Army
16 Reserve.

17 (4) The United States Air Force or United States Air
18 Force Reserve.

19 (5) The United States Navy or United States Navy
20 Reserve.

21 (6) The United States Marine Corps or United States
22 Marine Corps Reserve.

23 (7) The United States Coast Guard or United States
24 Coast Guard Reserve.

25 (8) The Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion,
26 the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Disabled

1 Veterans of America, or any other non-profit organization
2 that solely serves veterans and qualifies for an exemption
3 under 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue
4 Code.

5 (9) Military spouses.

6 (10) The brain injury services community that serves
7 veterans.

8 (11) The substance abuse services community that
9 serves veterans.

10 (12) The community-based mental health counseling
11 service community that serves veterans or has significant
12 expertise in the treatment of veterans.

13 (13) Military and military family advocacy networks.

14 (14) Practicing behavioral healthcare specialists that
15 serve veterans or have significant expertise in the
16 treatment of veterans.

17 (15) Community faith-based and spiritual leaders who
18 have experience working with service members, veterans,
19 and their families.

20 (c) The Commission may invite federal agencies such as the
21 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of
22 Labor, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,
23 and military services agencies to participate on the
24 Commission.

25 (d) The Departments of Military Affairs and Veterans'
26 Affairs shall provide administrative support to the

1 Commission. The Governor's Office shall provide additional
2 support with respect to compliance with State ethics laws, the
3 Open Meetings Act, and the Freedom of Information Act.

4 (e) A simple majority of the members of the Commission
5 shall constitute a quorum.

6 (f) All recommendations made by the Commission shall
7 require approval of a majority of the total membership of the
8 Commission.

9 (g) The Commission shall hold at least 4 meetings each
10 year, but otherwise shall meet at the call of the Chairperson
11 or co-vice chairs. Meetings of the Commission may be conducted
12 in person or via telephone or video conference and shall be
13 open to the public.

14 (h) The Commission may adopt policies, procedures, and
15 whatever additional rules for an organizational structure, and
16 policies and procedures for the Commission's internal
17 operations as are necessary to carry out its function and
18 responsibilities.

19 (i) Members of the Commission shall be appointed for a
20 term of 4 years. Upon expiration of the initial terms, each
21 member shall be reappointed for a term of 4 additional years
22 whereupon their terms will expire requiring the appointment of
23 new members. Members shall serve at the pleasure of the
24 Governor. Vacancies resulting for reasons other than the
25 expiration of a term shall be filled by the Governor for the
26 remainder of the term.

1 (j) Members shall receive no compensation for their
2 services.

3 (k) Service members, veterans, and their families shall be
4 given priority for seats on the Commission, if possible.

5 (l) All departments, agencies, boards, and commissions of
6 the executive branch shall fully cooperate with the Commission
7 in carrying out the purposes of this Act and shall provide
8 staff support and other assistance as requested.

9 Section 20. Duties.

10 (a) The primary focus of the Commission shall be on
11 improving the efficiency and effectiveness of those State
12 programs and services related to the military community. The
13 Commission shall review the activities related to the military
14 community of each State agency to ensure there is efficient
15 and effective coordination and alignment with the needs of the
16 military community. Accountability shall be promoted by
17 tracking the progress of initiatives and programs and
18 services; developing strategic collaboration among public
19 (primarily the Department of Public Health, the Department of
20 Human Services' Division of Mental Health, and the Department
21 of Veterans' Affairs) and private partners (primarily Illinois
22 Joining Forces); and increasing public awareness of the issues
23 relating to the services and support of the military community
24 to prevent veteran suicide.

25 (b) The Commission shall promote coordination and

1 efficiency among State, county, and local units of government
2 and municipalities through knowledge sharing, mobilization of
3 resources, and an aligned approach to serving the military
4 community to prevent veteran suicide.

5 (c) The Commission shall issue periodic reports on,
6 without limitation, its establishment of strategic goals, its
7 public research agenda, and its performance and progress in
8 meeting its goals.

9 (d) The Commission shall monitor the progress of the
10 implementation of the Strategic Action Plan on Homelessness
11 developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
12 the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
13 Administration's (SAMHSA) Service Members, Veterans, and their
14 Families Technical Assistance Center, SAMHSA's Policy
15 Academies, and SAMHSA's Implementation Academies as they
16 address the needs of the service members and veterans
17 community, and their families, to prevent veteran suicide.

18 (e) Each member agency on the Commission must designate a
19 member of its management staff as its Ombudsman for the
20 military community. The Ombudsman shall be that agency's
21 primary point of contact for military community issues. Each
22 member agency shall also designate one full-time employee to
23 provide staff assistance to the Commission.

24 Section 25. Transparency. In addition to whatever policies
25 or procedures it may adopt, the Commission shall be subject to

1 the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act and the Open
2 Meetings Act.

3 Section 30. Severability. The provisions of this Act are
4 severable under Section 1.31 of the Statute on Statutes.