



## 103RD GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### State of Illinois

2023 and 2024

HB2540

Introduced 2/15/2023, by Rep. Joyce Mason

#### SYNOPSIS AS INTRODUCED:

New Act

Creates the Veterans Bill of Rights Act. Requires the Department of Veterans' Affairs to make specified efforts to: (1) increase loans to small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans or service-disabled veterans; (2) increase veterans' access to health care coverage and services; (3) take specified steps toward preventing veteran suicide; and (4) develop and implement a strategy to end veteran homelessness within 3 years. Directs the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation to review all State licenses for which military service members may have relevant training or experience, produce a report recommending steps that can be taken to increase recognition of military training and experience toward licensing, and take those steps within one year of issuing the report. Contains provisions regarding veterans at public institutions of higher education receiving college credit, registering for courses, and being called to active duty. Requires the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity to annually review apprentice, training, and other vocational programs focused on providing job training and placement to returning military service members and veterans. Contains other provisions.

LRB103 27180 KTG 53550 b

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 Bill of Rights Act.

6 Section 5. Definitions. In this Act:

7 "Department" means the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

8 "EMS personnel" has the same meaning provided in Section  
9 3.5 of the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Systems Act.

10 "Public institution of higher education" has the same  
11 meaning provided in Section 10 of the Illinois Prepaid Tuition  
12 Act.

13 Section 10. Loans to veteran business concerns; monthly  
14 reports.

15 (a) The Department may target any loans granted by the  
16 Department toward small business concerns owned and controlled  
17 by veterans or service-disabled veterans, with a goal of 7% of  
18 annual loaned funds reaching such businesses.

19 (b) The Department shall produce monthly electronic  
20 reports of workforce need projections by industry, job type,  
21 geography, and credentials needed. The report shall include a  
22 comparison of workforce needs to existing and projected

1 workforce and credential availability in Illinois, a list of  
2 top in-demand industries, job types, and credentials by  
3 geographic area, and a mapping of which in-demand job titles  
4 and credentials would leverage skills, experience, and  
5 credentials possessed by veterans. The Department shall  
6 forward the report monthly to appropriate military  
7 out-placement offices, education centers, nonprofit programs,  
8 and any State agencies working to connect veterans with jobs.

9 Section 15. Recognition of military training and  
10 experience.

11 (a) The Department shall take all necessary steps to  
12 annually increase the number of veterans taking advantage of  
13 the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Military  
14 Skills Test Waiver Program. These steps shall include, but are  
15 not limited to, ensuring information on the Program is  
16 accessible on the Department's website, coordinating with  
17 military placement and training programs, including, but not  
18 limited to, the Credentialing Opportunities On-Line program,  
19 and disseminating information on the Program to veterans with  
20 relevant experience who are newly located or locating in  
21 Illinois.

22 (b) The Department of Public Health shall immediately  
23 review all licensing practices and take all necessary and  
24 appropriate steps to increase recognition of military training  
25 and experience toward licensing of EMS personnel. Within one

1 year after the effective date of this Act, the Department of  
2 Public Health shall report to the General Assembly any  
3 additional steps that may require legislation and request that  
4 the General Assembly pass that legislation.

5 (c) The Department of Financial and Professional  
6 Regulation shall review all State licenses for which military  
7 service members may have relevant training or experience and,  
8 within one year after the effective date of this Act, produce a  
9 report recommending steps that can be taken to increase  
10 recognition of military training and experience toward  
11 licensing. As soon as practicable, but by no later than one  
12 year after issuance of the report, the Department of Financial  
13 and Professional Regulation shall then take any steps  
14 identified in the report that can be taken without further  
15 legislation and shall report to the General Assembly annually  
16 to request it enact any necessary legislation.

17 Section 20. College credit; course registration; students  
18 called to active duty.

19 (a) A veteran who enrolls as a student in good standing at  
20 a public institution of higher education shall upon  
21 application be granted academic credits without limitation  
22 toward his or her degree for completion of courses that were  
23 part of the veteran's military training or service if the  
24 completed courses meet the standards of the American Council  
25 on Education, or its equivalent, for the awarding of academic

1 credits. No fee, tuition, or other charge shall be assessed  
2 against a veteran who qualifies for academic credit under this  
3 subsection.

4 (b) A public institution of higher education that offers  
5 an early course registration period for any segment of the  
6 student population shall have a process in place to offer  
7 early course registration to students who are veterans or  
8 National Guard members. A veteran with no previous college  
9 experience shall be permitted to file applications up to the  
10 end of registration and begin classes pending completion of  
11 his or her application and provision of supporting documents.

12 (c) A student who is called to active duty in the armed  
13 forces of the United States after having attended a public  
14 institution of higher education regularly for 13 weeks or  
15 more, or having completed 85% of the term's work through  
16 acceleration, shall be given full credit for each course in  
17 which he or she has a grade of C or better. A student called to  
18 active duty who does not meet attendance requirements  
19 sufficient to earn a grade shall be entitled to a 100% refund  
20 of tuition and fees. Upon a veteran's return from active duty,  
21 he or she may register after normal registration periods end  
22 without late fees or other penalties.

23 (d) A public institution of higher education shall adopt  
24 any and all procedures that are necessary to fully implement  
25 this Section.

1           Section 25. Training programs. The Department of Commerce  
2 and Economic Opportunity shall annually review apprentice,  
3 training, and other vocational programs focused on providing  
4 job training and placement to returning military service  
5 members and veterans. The annual review shall evaluate the  
6 costs and results and recommend programs for expansion using  
7 State funding, including, but not limited to, an estimate of  
8 future returns to the State of improved outcomes from the  
9 expansion of programs. The Department of Commerce and Economic  
10 Opportunity shall provide an annual report to the General  
11 Assembly and Governor on January 1 of each year for 5 years  
12 after the effective date of this Act, to be used by the General  
13 Assembly to inform annual budget decisions.

14           Section 30. Access to health care.

15           (a) The Department shall develop and operate veteran  
16 health navigator services to increase access to health care  
17 coverage and services. The Department shall identify, train,  
18 and deploy veteran health navigators who have direct knowledge  
19 of the veteran communities they serve. Leveraging existing  
20 resources and structures where veterans and their families are  
21 likely to be found, the veteran health navigators shall:

22                   (1) help identify all federal and other health  
23                   benefits, coverage, and services available to veterans and  
24                   their families; and

25                   (2) coordinate with relevant departments, health care

1 providers, and health insurance programs to help veterans  
2 and their beneficiaries apply for coverage under such  
3 programs, including helping veterans overcome barriers  
4 within the health care system to ensure enrollment in  
5 health plans and effective delivery and coordination of  
6 health services.

7 (b) Using the veteran health services and navigators  
8 described in subsection (a) as a source of information about  
9 the unique needs, coverage, and treatment gaps faced by  
10 veterans and their families, the Department shall examine all  
11 existing programs designed to increase access to affordable,  
12 quality health care and evaluate whether the needs of veterans  
13 and their families are met by those programs or whether  
14 further coordination with the veteran health navigators or  
15 other steps would better meet the needs of veterans and their  
16 families. The Department shall then produce a report of its  
17 findings, recommendations, and any additional legislative or  
18 budget action it recommends, deliver that report to the  
19 General Assembly and the Governor, and release it to the news  
20 media.

21 (c) The Department shall prepare a report showing the  
22 impacts that Medicaid expansion has had to date for the  
23 community of veterans and their families in Illinois,  
24 including any recommendations for better including or serving  
25 veterans and their families in that expansion. The Department  
26 shall deliver that report to the General Assembly and the

1 Governor and release it to the news media.

2 Section 35. Suicide prevention.

3 (a) The Department shall ensure that access to mental  
4 health coverage, services, and treatment is included as a full  
5 focus stream of the veteran health navigator services  
6 described in subsection (a) of Section 30, and that veteran  
7 health navigators help identify all federal and other mental  
8 health benefits, coverage, and services available to veterans  
9 and their families, including, but not limited to, those  
10 relating to post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and  
11 suicide prevention.

12 (b) In coordination with local, State, and federal  
13 governmental agencies, and in consultation with nonprofits,  
14 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, localities,  
15 municipalities that have effective prevention and treatment  
16 systems for mental health, and service providers such as  
17 Veterans Affairs medical centers, the Department shall develop  
18 and implement a strategy to reduce barriers to access to  
19 mental health services and treatment for veterans and their  
20 families. The Department shall develop the strategy using  
21 methods including, but not limited to, the following:

22 (1) Identifying structural and logistical barriers to  
23 accessing treatment, including, but not limited to,  
24 perceived stigma, long travel distances to receive care,  
25 and any other barriers. The Department shall create an



1 annual report on the barriers, which shall be delivered to  
2 the General Assembly and the Governor and made available  
3 on the Department's website.

4 (2) Resolving all barriers identified in paragraph (1)  
5 that can be resolved without legislative or budgetary  
6 action, including, but not limited to, the following:

7 (A) increased coordination between State agencies,  
8 nonprofit providers, and the federal government;

9 (B) application for and use of private and federal  
10 grants; and

11 (C) any other actions.

12 (3) Reporting annually to the General Assembly and the  
13 Governor and making available on the Department's website  
14 any additional legislative or budgetary steps that would  
15 resolve the barriers identified in paragraph (1) that have  
16 not been resolved by the steps taken in paragraph (2).

17 (c) In coordination with local, State, and federal  
18 governmental agencies, and in consultation with nonprofits,  
19 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, localities, cities  
20 that have effective prevention and treatment systems for  
21 mental health, and service providers such as Veterans Affairs  
22 medical centers, the Department shall enhance and strengthen  
23 suicide prevention programs in keeping with proven best  
24 practices and research, using methods including, but not  
25 limited to, the following:

26 (1) Identifying and applying for federal and private

1 grants focused on veteran suicide prevention.

2 (2) Coordinating local, State, federal, and nonprofit  
3 programs that include community-based approaches for  
4 at-risk veterans and veterans at large.

5 (3) Providing technical assistance to communities to  
6 develop strategic plans to reduce veteran suicide,  
7 including, but not limited to, coordination and  
8 participation by local leaders, faith communities,  
9 schools, workplaces, and other stakeholders.

10 (4) Evaluating community strategic plans within  
11 Illinois and disseminating methods and best practices to  
12 optimize the impact of efforts by all partners and  
13 stakeholders.

14 (d) The Department shall create a centralized provider  
15 database, identifying, by region, mental health providers with  
16 the expertise and ability to assist veterans and their  
17 families. The database shall highlight providers with training  
18 or experience in the prevention and treatment of veteran  
19 suicide.

20 (e) Using existing resources, and incorporating best  
21 practices and research from the U.S. Department of Veterans  
22 Affairs and State and nonprofit service providers in Illinois,  
23 the Department shall develop a continuing education course for  
24 mental health providers in Illinois to obtain expertise in  
25 veteran suicide assessment, prevention, treatment, and risk  
26 management and shall make the program available for free to

1 providers in regions of the State lacking sufficiently trained  
2 providers, as determined by the database created under  
3 subsection (d).

4 (f) Using existing or appropriated resources, the  
5 Department shall identify evidence-based best practices to  
6 increase awareness of any veteran suicide prevention hotline  
7 and other crisis resources in Illinois or nationally with  
8 proven effectiveness in reducing veteran suicide.

9 Section 40. Strategy for ending veteran homelessness.

10 (a) In coordination with local, State, and federal  
11 governmental agencies and nonprofits, and in consultation with  
12 states and municipalities that have achieved an end to veteran  
13 homelessness, the Department shall develop and implement a  
14 strategy to end veteran homelessness within 3 years. The  
15 strategy shall include, but is not limited to, the following:

16 (1) Coordinated community outreach and a common  
17 assessment tool.

18 (2) A community-wide, comprehensive list of veterans  
19 by name who are experiencing homelessness, prioritized  
20 based on vulnerability.

21 (3) Data-sharing among all relevant providers, State  
22 agencies, and Veterans Affairs medical centers.

23 (4) Increased coordination and streamlined processes  
24 for appropriate housing placements.

25 (5) Connecting veterans experiencing homelessness to

1 health, mental health, employment, and training resources  
2 through the services described in this Act.

3 (6) A commitment to housing first principles, as  
4 propounded by the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

5 (7) Identification of and application for funding, as  
6 needed, from private and foundation sources and other  
7 partners.

8 (b) In this Section, "end veteran homelessness" means an  
9 outcome meeting the criteria identified and most recently  
10 released by the United States Interagency Council on  
11 Homelessness.