

CHAPTER 2025-146

Committee Substitute for Committee Substitute for Senate Bill No. 116

An act relating to veterans; amending s. 265.003, F.S.; revising the maximum number of nominees for the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame submitted by the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for submission to the Governor and the Cabinet; amending s. 292.05, F.S.; requiring the Department of Veterans' Affairs to conduct a study that includes a survey evaluating the extent to which specified persons are aware of certain existing programs or services; requiring that such survey also include specified recommendations; requiring that a certain report include additional actions taken by the Department of Veterans' Affairs and other information and recommendations as the department determines are necessary; requiring that a specified report include an evaluation of the health literacy of veterans in this state and recommendations on how to increase knowledge of programs and services available to such veterans; requiring the department to ensure coordination to the greatest extent possible with the United States Department of Defense for a specified purpose; authorizing the Department of Veterans' Affairs to engage county and city veteran service officers for assistance; amending s. 292.115, F.S.; revising the purpose of the Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program to include specialized mental health training; requiring individuals electing to participate in the pilot program to be trained to identify indicators of mental health conditions; requiring the department to contract with an organization developing and implementing veteran-relevant and evidence-based mental health assistance training; amending s. 295.124, F.S.; revising a reference to the United States Code; amending s. 295.21, F.S.; requiring Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., to advise the Department of Veterans' Affairs on specified problems or needs of certain military personnel and their spouses; amending s. 295.22, F.S.; revising the collaborators of the Veterans Employment and Training Services Program to include a specified direct-support organization; amending s. 296.43, F.S.; requiring the Department of Veterans' Affairs to develop a plan to establish adult day health care facilities across this state to serve veterans and their families; requiring that such plans include specified information; requiring the department to provide a specified report to the Legislature by a specified date; amending s. 320.08058, F.S.; authorizing the use of a specified percentage of proceeds from the sale of a specified specialty license plate for the promotion and administrative costs of the plate; providing appropriations; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Paragraph (a) of subsection (4) of section 265.003, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

265.003 Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame.—

(4)(a) The Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame Council shall annually accept nominations of persons to be considered for induction into the Florida Veterans' Hall of Fame and shall transmit a list of up to 5 ~~20~~ nominees to the Department of Veterans' Affairs for submission to the Governor and the Cabinet, who will select the nominees to be inducted.

Section 2. Paragraph (b) of subsection (5) and subsection (6) of section 292.05, Florida Statutes, are amended, and subsection (8) is added to that section, to read:

292.05 Duties of Department of Veterans' Affairs.—

(5) The department shall conduct an ongoing study on the problems and needs of those residents of this state who are veterans of the Armed Forces of the United States and the problems and needs of their spouses and dependents. The study shall include, but not be limited to:

(b) A survey of the needs of such persons in the areas of social services, health care, education, and employment, and any other areas of determined need, with recommendations regarding federal, state, and community services that would meet those needs. The survey must also evaluate the extent to which such persons are aware of existing federal, state, or community programs or services that meet their areas of need, with recommendations regarding increasing public awareness using administrative or legislative options.

(6) The department shall, by December 31 of each year, submit an annual written report to the Governor, the Cabinet, and the Legislature which describes:

(a) The expenses incurred in veteran service work in the state; the number, nature, and kind of cases handled by the department and by county and city veteran service officers of the state; the amounts of benefits obtained for veterans; the names and addresses of all certified veteran service officers, including county and city veteran service officers.

~~(b) The report must also describe~~ The actions taken by the department in implementing subsections (4), (5), ~~and (7), and (8)~~ and includes include other information and recommendations as the department determines are necessary to provide information on its annual activities requires.

~~(c)(b)~~ The current status of the department's domiciliary and nursing homes established pursuant to chapter 296, including all receipts and expenditures, the condition of the homes, the number of residents received and discharged during the preceding year, occupancy rates, staffing, and any other information necessary to provide an understanding of the management, conduct, and operation of the homes.

(d) For the report due on December 31, 2025, an evaluation by the department among veterans in this state on the level of health literacy and any recommendations to increase veteran knowledge of available programs and services and maximize their use of such resources.

(8) The department shall ensure coordination to the greatest extent possible with the United States Department of Defense to directly engage all servicemembers returning home to, or electing to remain in or move to, this state following their service and during reentry into civilian life, including connecting them with Florida Is For Veterans, Inc., and other relevant resources. The department may engage county and city veteran service officers for assistance with fulfilling this duty.

Section 3. Subsections (1) and (2) of section 292.115, Florida Statutes, are amended to read:

292.115 Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program.—

(1) The Department of Veterans' Affairs shall establish the Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program. The purpose of the pilot program is to offer to each Department of Veterans' Affairs claims examiner and each county and city veteran service officer, as described in s. 292.11, specialized mental health training and certification in the prevention of veteran suicide.

(2) Individuals electing to participate in the pilot program must be trained to identify indicators of mental health conditions and elevated suicide risk and provide emergency crisis referrals for veterans expressing or exhibiting symptoms of emotional or psychological distress. The Department of Veterans' Affairs shall contract with an organization having proven experience developing and implementing veteran-relevant and evidence-based mental health assistance and suicide prevention training to develop the curriculum for such training. The department shall establish and oversee the process for certifying program participants who successfully complete such training.

Section 4. Section 295.124, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

295.124 State approving agency for veterans' education and training. The Department of Veterans' Affairs shall act as the state approving agency for purposes of veterans' education and training, in accordance with 38 U.S.C. s. 3671 ~~38 U.S.C. s. 1771~~ and the applicable annual contract between the state and the Federal Government.

Section 5. Paragraph (h) is added to subsection (3) of section 295.21, Florida Statutes, to read:

295.21 Florida Is For Veterans, Inc.—

(3) DUTIES.—The corporation shall:

(h) Advise the Department of Veterans' Affairs on any problems or needs of retired and recently separated military personnel of this state and any problems or needs of their spouses which the corporation has knowledge of and which may be within the purview of the department in fulfilling its duties.

Section 6. Paragraph (c) of subsection (5) of section 295.22, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

295.22 Veterans Employment and Training Services Program.—

(5) COLLABORATION.—

(c) The corporation may collaborate with other state agencies and entities for outreach, information exchange, marketing, and referrals regarding programs and initiatives that include, but are not limited to, the program created by this section and those within any of the following:

1. The Department of Veterans' Affairs:
 - a. Access to benefits and assistance programs.
 - b. Hope Navigators Program.
2. The Department of Commerce:
 - a. The Disabled Veteran Outreach Program and local veteran employment representatives.
 - b. CareerSource Florida, Inc., and local workforce boards employment and recruitment services.
 - c. The Quick-Response Training Program.
 - d. Efforts of the direct-support organization ~~Florida Defense Support Task Force~~ created under s. 288.987, the Florida Small Business Development Center Network, and the direct support organization established in s. 288.012(6).
3. The Department of Business and Professional Regulation, reciprocity and the availability of certain license and fee waivers.
4. The Department of Education:
 - a. CAPE industry certifications under s. 1008.44.
 - b. Information related to earning postsecondary credit at public postsecondary educational institutions for college-level training and education acquired in the military under s. 1004.096.
5. The Department of Health:

- a. The Office of Veteran Licensure Services.
 - b. The Florida Veterans Application for Licensure Online Response expedited licensing.
6. The Office of Reimagining Education and Career Help.

Section 7. Section 296.43, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

296.43 Purpose and statewide plan.—

(1) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this part is to provide for the establishment of basic standards for the operation of veterans' adult day health care programs for eligible veterans in need of such services.

(2) STATEWIDE PLAN.—The department shall develop a plan to establish adult day health care facilities across this state to serve veterans and their families.

(a) The plan must include:

1. Recommendations for locations that will have the most impact on the veteran population. In making such recommendations, the department shall:

a. Provide an evaluation of data, including, but not limited to, veteran population and veteran population demographics.

b. Provide an assessment of anticipated veteran needs.

2. Potential state and federal participation.

3. Estimates for the daily cost of running the facilities.

4. Estimates for the daily cost of maintenance and general upkeep of the facilities.

5. Locations of existing potential infrastructure.

6. Potential construction costs.

(b) The department shall provide a report detailing the plan required by this subsection to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives by November 1, 2025.

Section 8. Subsection (92) of section 320.08058, Florida Statutes, is amended to read:

320.08058 Specialty license plates.—

(92) GADSDEN FLAG LICENSE PLATES.—

(a) The department shall develop a Gadsden Flag license plate as provided in this section and s. 320.08053. The design of the license plate must replicate the color, layout, and design of the Gadsden Flag. The word “Florida” must appear at the top of the plate, and the words “Don’t Tread on Me” must appear at the bottom of the plate.

(b) The annual use fees shall be distributed to the Florida Veterans Foundation, a direct-support organization of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, and must be used to benefit veterans. Up to 10 percent of the proceeds may be used for ~~continuing~~ promotion and marketing of the license plate and for administrative costs.

Section 9. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$50,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to conduct a survey evaluating the extent to which resident veterans and their spouses and dependents are aware of existing federal, state, and local programs and services that meet their areas of need and for the department to develop a plan to establish adult day health care facilities across this state to serve veterans and their families.

Section 10. For the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the sum of \$300,000 in nonrecurring funds from the General Revenue Fund is appropriated to the contracted services category to the Department of Veterans’ Affairs to implement the Veteran Suicide Prevention Training Pilot Program, as amended by this act.

Section 11. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.

Approved by the Governor June 19, 2025.

Filed in Office Secretary of State June 19, 2025.