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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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SENATE BILL

No. 1133 Session of  
2014

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INTRODUCED BY YUDICHAK, KITCHEN, TEPLITZ, BREWSTER, KASUNIC,  
FERLO, WASHINGTON, FONTANA, ARGALL, HUGHES, ERICKSON, SMITH,  
VULAKOVICH, BLAKE, WILEY, STACK, RAFFERTY, SCHWANK, GORDNER,  
SOLOBAY, COSTA, BOSCOLA, FARNESE AND BROWNE, JANUARY 13, 2014

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REFERRED TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE, JANUARY 13, 2014

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AN ACT

1 Providing for peer-to-peer support for veterans; and making an  
2 appropriation.

3 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
4 hereby enacts as follows:

5 Section 1. Short title.

6 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Peer-to-Peer  
7 Support for Veterans Act.

8 Section 2. Legislative findings.

9 The General Assembly finds and declares as follows:

10 (1) The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has a moral duty  
11 and responsibility to provide proper services to its military  
12 personnel and veterans, including the new class of veterans  
13 returning from deployment in United States military  
14 operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

15 (2) While many individuals will return with physical  
16 injuries and disabilities, a larger number will return with

1 psychological injuries connected to the trauma and stress  
2 associated with combat.

3 (3) Posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain  
4 injury, military sexual trauma and alarming rates of suicide  
5 among active duty personnel and veterans require the  
6 Commonwealth to take immediate action to ensure that the  
7 proper mental health, addiction and other services are  
8 available to its military personnel.

9 (4) Statistics have shown that over 300,000 veterans, or  
10 approximately one in five, of Operation Iraqi Freedom and  
11 Operation Enduring Freedom were diagnosed with posttraumatic  
12 stress disorder by the end of 2012. Treatment costs for the  
13 veterans have been estimated to exceed \$2,000,000,000.

14 (5) In 2012, there were approximately 3,374 reported  
15 cases of military sexual trauma, which includes rape, sexual  
16 assault and sexual harassment. However, it is estimated that  
17 approximately 26,000 service members experienced unwanted  
18 sexual contact.

19 (6) In 2012, suicide rates among active duty personnel  
20 averaged one per day.

21 (7) Veterans now account for 20% of all United States  
22 suicides, with veterans under 24 years of age committing  
23 suicide at rates four times higher than other veterans  
24 groups.

25 (8) Posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain  
26 injury, military sexual trauma and suicide among veterans are  
27 often linked with alcohol or substance abuse as veterans seek  
28 to find relief from the symptoms and feelings.

29 (9) Unfortunately, the stigma attached to receiving  
30 mental health treatment often causes military personnel and

1 veterans to avoid seeking professional treatment for their  
2 condition.

3 (10) Establishing a program where veterans can support  
4 one another through peer-to-peer counseling may assist in  
5 removing the stigma surrounding receipt of mental health or  
6 addiction services and allow veterans to receive needed care  
7 as the veterans recover from the psychological scars often  
8 associated with military service.

9 Section 3. Definitions.

10 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall  
11 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
12 context clearly indicates otherwise:

13 "Certified peer counselor." An individual who meets all of  
14 the following:

15 (1) Has personal experience as a mental health treatment  
16 recipient or who is in recovery from alcohol abuse, sexual  
17 abuse or trauma, substance abuse or chemical dependence.

18 (2) Has:

19 (i) served in the active military or naval service  
20 of the United States or the Pennsylvania National Guard  
21 and has been released from service other than by  
22 dishonorable discharge, as documented by the individual's  
23 discharge papers; or

24 (ii) been furloughed to the reserve components of  
25 the armed forces of the United States.

26 (3) Has the training, credentials or experience to  
27 provide counseling and is recognized by the department under  
28 this act.

29 "Department." The Department of Health of the Commonwealth.

30 "Peer support service." A service that meets all of the

1 following:

2 (1) Is designated by the department and which is used in  
3 the treatment of and recovery from mental illness, sexual  
4 abuse trauma, alcohol abuse, substance abuse or chemical  
5 dependence.

6 (2) Is delivered by a certified peer counselor.

7 "Secretary." The Secretary of Health of the Commonwealth.

8 "Veteran." As defined in 51 Pa.C.S. § 9601 (relating to  
9 definitions).

10 Section 4. Duties of department.

11 (a) Establishment of programs.--Notwithstanding any other  
12 provision of law, the secretary, in conjunction with the  
13 Secretary of the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and the  
14 Adjutant General, or the Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans'  
15 Affairs if designated by the Adjutant General, shall develop and  
16 establish a minimum of four regional peer support service  
17 programs for veterans in this Commonwealth. The department  
18 shall, if possible, establish the programs in a manner that  
19 ensures access to a program by all veterans within this  
20 Commonwealth regardless of geographic location.

21 (b) Services.--Services provided by a peer support service  
22 program established under subsection (a) shall include peer-to-  
23 peer counseling for all of the following:

24 (1) Mental health issues, including treatment and  
25 recovery support for posttraumatic stress disorder, traumatic  
26 brain injury and depression.

27 (2) Alcohol, substance abuse or chemical dependence  
28 treatment and recovery support, including treatment planning,  
29 recovery coaching and relapse prevention.

30 (3) Military sexual trauma treatment and recovery

1 support.

2 (4) Co-occurring disorders.

3 (5) Any other counseling service which the department  
4 believes will further the intent and goals of this act.

5 Section 5. Certified peer counselors.

6 The department, in conjunction with the Department of Public  
7 Welfare, the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and the  
8 Adjutant General, or the Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans'  
9 Affairs if designated by the Adjutant General, shall establish  
10 guidelines for the recruitment, training and development of  
11 individuals capable of providing the services under section  
12 4(b). The guidelines shall include the establishment of minimum  
13 qualifications to receive credentials as a certified peer  
14 counselor and procedures to suspend, revoke or annul the  
15 credentials.

16 Section 6. Nonprofit organization.

17 Nothing under this act shall prohibit the department from  
18 contracting with nonprofit organizations within this  
19 Commonwealth that provide services to veterans to offer peer-to-  
20 peer counseling in accordance with this act.

21 Section 7. Publication.

22 (a) Duty.--The department shall publish the contact  
23 information for an entity offering peer-to-peer counseling under  
24 this act in the Pennsylvania Bulletin.

25 (b) The department and the Department of Military Affairs  
26 shall each post the contact information for an entity offering  
27 peer-to-peer counseling under this act on its publicly  
28 accessible Internet website.

29 Section 20. Appropriation.

30 The sum of \$1,000,000 is appropriated to the department to

- 1 carry out the provisions of this act.
- 2 Section 21. Effective date.
- 3 This act shall take effect in 60 days.