
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 1133 Session of
2014

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

REFERRED TO PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE, JANUARY 13, 2014

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
17 psychological injuries connected to the trauma and stress

1 associated with combat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

28 (9) Unfortunately, the stigma attached to receiving
29 mental health treatment often causes military personnel and
30 veterans to avoid seeking professional treatment for their

1 condition.

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

8 Section 3. Definitions.

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

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

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

17 (2) Has:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

9 Section 4. Duties of department.

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

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

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

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

29 (3) Military sexual trauma treatment and recovery
30 support.

1 (4) Co-occurring disorders.

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

4 Section 5. Certified peer counselors.

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

15 Section 6. Nonprofit organization.

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

20 Section 7. Publication.

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

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

28 Section 20. Appropriation.

29 The sum of \$1,000,000 is appropriated to the department to
30 carry out the provisions of this act.

1 Section 21. Effective date.

2 This act shall take effect in 60 days.