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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE BILL

No. 1697 Session of  
2019

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INTRODUCED BY MURT, SCHLOSSBERG, KINSEY, McNEILL, A. DAVIS,  
MERSKI, SOLOMON, YOUNGBLOOD, GALLOWAY, DeLUCA, MARKOSEK,  
HILL-EVANS, SAINATO, FREEMAN, CIRESI, CALTAGIRONE, GOODMAN  
AND SCHWEYER, JULY 8, 2019

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REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS, JULY 8, 2019

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AN ACT

1 Amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) of the Pennsylvania  
2 Consolidated Statutes, providing for the delivery of services  
3 and programs to veterans with cognitive mental disability and  
4 emotional trauma; and establishing the Office of Veterans'  
5 Mental Health Awareness.

6 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
7 hereby enacts as follows:

8 Section 1. Part VI of Title 51 of the Pennsylvania  
9 Consolidated Statutes is amended by adding a chapter to read:

10 CHAPTER 84

11 VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

12 Sec.

13 8401. Scope of chapter.

14 8402. Definitions.

15 8403. Declaration of policy.

16 8404. Establishment.

17 8405. Powers and duties of office.

18 8406. Partnerships.

1 8407. Funding.

2 § 8401. Scope of chapter.

3 This chapter relates to veterans' mental health awareness.

4 § 8402. Definitions.

5 The following words and phrases when used in this chapter  
6 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
7 context clearly indicates otherwise:

8 "Health care provider." A person who helps in identifying,  
9 preventing or treating illness and disability.

10 "Mental illness" or "disability." Any of the following:

11 (1) A physical or mental impairment that substantially  
12 limits one or more of the major life activities of the  
13 individual.

14 (2) A record of the type of impairment described in  
15 paragraph (1).

16 (3) Being regarded as having the type of impairment  
17 described in paragraph (1).

18 "Sexual and personal trauma." An event of human design that  
19 threatens or inflicts harm.

20 "Trauma." Any lingering physical, emotional or psychological  
21 symptom, including rape, physical assault, domestic battery and  
22 stalking.

23 "Traumatic brain injury." A blow or jolt to the head or a  
24 penetrating head injury that disrupts the function of the brain.

25 "Veterans health care partnership." An agreement between the  
26 United States Department of Veterans Affairs and a health care  
27 provider to assist in identifying veterans who need care due to  
28 cognitive or sexual and personal trauma.

29 § 8403. Declaration of policy.

30 The following are declared as the legislative policies

1 underlying this chapter:

2       (1) Veterans and their beneficiaries should have access  
3 to the full range of support services and programs, including  
4 equal access to all support services and awareness programs  
5 providing information to veterans and health care providers  
6 regarding veterans' mental disabilities, mental illness,  
7 sexual and personal trauma and available health care  
8 providers. Information and services regarding veterans'  
9 mental health issues shall include the full range of  
10 instructional guides but not be limited to signs, symptoms,  
11 risk factors and benefits of early detection through  
12 appropriate diagnostic testing and treatment options.

13       (2) Veterans and their beneficiaries have traditionally  
14 been underserved. They have often been denied access to  
15 individualized and specialized services available to them  
16 because of misdiagnosis or symptoms that manifest later in a  
17 veteran's life, such as services necessary to their health,  
18 well-being, independence and advancement.

19       (3) Support services and awareness programs provided by  
20 the Commonwealth to veterans and their families should be  
21 provided in a manner that promotes independent living and  
22 continued care with partnered health care providers and  
23 assists in maintaining employment and support services for  
24 people in their homes and communities.

25       (4) A department office is needed to advise and assist  
26 the department and health care providers in developing  
27 support services and programs for veterans and their families  
28 with trauma or disability.

29 § 8404. Establishment.

30 The Office of Veterans' Mental Health Awareness is

1 established within the department.

2 § 8405. Powers and duties of office.

3 The Office of Veterans' Mental Health Awareness shall have  
4 the power and its duty shall be to:

5 (1) Conduct departmental policy analysis on specific  
6 issues related to veterans' mental health and awareness.

7 (2) Act as a liaison to expand the availability of  
8 programs and access to partnered health care providers.

9 (3) Develop policies to expand and improve outreach  
10 services to all veterans and families in urban and rural  
11 populations.

12 (4) Perform internal department staff training and,  
13 whenever possible, the training of health care professionals  
14 to ensure early identification and management of veteran  
15 stress-related disorders, including combat-related disorders.

16 (5) Assist health care providers that are partnered with  
17 the United States Department of Veterans Affairs on  
18 educational training related to mental health and sexual and  
19 personal trauma of veterans.

20 (6) Identify, in conjunction with the United States  
21 Department of Veterans Affairs, and disseminate a  
22 comprehensive disability examination that has a combat  
23 veteran focus that may be adopted and utilized by health care  
24 providers and identify unnecessary duplication of services  
25 and future service needs.

26 (7) Serve as a clearinghouse for information regarding  
27 veterans' mental health data, strategies and programs that  
28 address veterans' health issues, including mental health,  
29 sexual and personal trauma, traumatic brain injury,  
30 posttraumatic stress disorder and support services for family

1 members. The office shall also identify issues that impact  
2 veterans' mental health, including substance abuse, domestic  
3 violence, withdrawal from society and violence to oneself.

4 (8) Assist veterans who have trauma or disabilities and  
5 their families to have access to adequate and coordinated  
6 quality support services and programs.

7 (9) Develop policy initiatives to stimulate the support  
8 services and programs that veterans with disabilities or  
9 trauma and their families may utilize.

10 (10) Provide public service announcements and  
11 advertisements regarding the symptoms and detection of  
12 veterans' disabilities.

13 (11) Provide the necessary information described in this  
14 section for distribution as the office deems appropriate and  
15 provide health care providers, to the greatest extent  
16 possible, the same information.

17 (12) Determine whether to require health care providers  
18 to make medical information materials available to patients  
19 as appropriate.

20 (13) Coordinate pilot projects and planning projects  
21 that are related to veterans' health awareness and an  
22 efficient delivery system for veterans' health care in this  
23 Commonwealth.

24 (14) Provide technical assistance to counties, other  
25 public entities and private entities seeking to obtain funds  
26 for initiatives in veterans' health care, including  
27 identification of sources of funding and assistance.

28 (15) Identify gaps in trauma services, programs and  
29 funding shortages and report the findings to the Governor and  
30 the General Assembly.

1 § 8406. Partnerships.

2 The department shall:

3 (1) Consult with appropriate health care professionals  
4 and providers, veterans' service organizations and the State  
5 Veterans' Commission.

6 (2) Provide information pertaining to existing  
7 partnerships between health care providers and the United  
8 States Department of Veterans Affairs relating to veterans'  
9 mental health awareness and health care.

10 (3) Encourage innovative programs and partnerships by  
11 public and private entities that address veterans' mental  
12 health awareness and health care.

13 (4) To the greatest extent possible, along with the  
14 United States Department of Veterans Affairs, encourage and  
15 develop partnerships with health care providers.

16 § 8407. Funding.

17 The appropriation for administration of this chapter shall be  
18 by a separate line item in the General Appropriation Act.

19 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.