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## Housing, Human Services & Veterans Committee

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### HB 1181

**Brief Description:** Establishing programs and measures to prevent suicide among veterans and military members.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Orwall, Boehnke, Callan, Leavitt, Davis, Dolan, Valdez, Young, Riccelli, Lekanoff, Barkis, Peterson, Shewmake, Bronoske, Macri and Morgan.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides for various outreach and services related to preventing suicide among veterans and military service members.
- Creates the Veterans and Military Members Suicide Prevention Account and a suicide prevention community-based services grant program.
- Extends and modifies the Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force.
- Establishes a new special vehicle license plate emblem.

**Hearing Date:** 1/19/21

**Staff:** Dawn Eychaner (786-7135).

#### **Background:**

##### Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) delivers a variety of services to veterans in Washington, including administering a suicide prevention program and providing state-funded outreach and counseling programming for veterans and family members.

##### Governor's Challenge.

Washington is participating in a Governor's Challenge issued by the United States Department of

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Veterans Affairs (VA) and the United States Health & Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to implement a strategy for preventing veteran suicide.

The Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) Suicide Prevention Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) was formed to develop Washington's SMVF Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan. The Plan was submitted in December 2020.

#### Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force.

The Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force (Task Force) was established to raise public awareness and increase suicide prevention education. The Task Force is administered by the University of Washington (UW) School of Social Work. Task Force membership is comprised of representatives of suicide prevention organizations, the firearms industry, firearms rights organizations, law enforcement, health care professionals, and others. The Task Force membership is divided into a Suicide Prevention and Firearms Subcommittee and a Suicide Prevention and Health Care Subcommittee. The Task Force expires on July 1, 2021.

#### Special License Plates.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) issues special vehicle license plates that may be used in lieu of standard plates. Generally, special license plates are sponsored by a government or nonprofit organization and are available for an additional fee that is due annually upon vehicle registration renewal.

#### Safe Storage of Firearms.

Secure gun storage includes use of a locked box, gun safe, or other secure locked storage space that is designed to prevent the unauthorized use or discharge of a firearm. Every registered firearms dealer is required to offer, to sell, or to give a purchaser or transferee of any firearm a secure gun storage device, trigger lock, or similar device. In addition, dealers must provide written warnings to customers related to penalties for unsafe storage.

#### Health Care Provider Training.

Certain licensed health professionals must complete training in suicide assessment, treatment, and management. Some of these professionals, such as counselors and psychologists, must complete the training every six years. Others, such as physicians, pharmacists, and dentists, must complete the training once.

#### Other.

The Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) administers early learning, child welfare, and juvenile justice programs and services.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) administers public assistance programs such as Basic Food and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

## **Summary of Bill:**

### Governor's Challenge.

Beginning December 2021, the Governor's Challenge Team and the Advisory Committee must report to the Legislature on a biannual basis regarding implementation of Washington's SMVF Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan.

### Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force.

A member of a Washington or federally recognized Indian tribe is added to the membership of both Task Force subcommittees. The Suicide Prevention and Firearms Subcommittee membership is amended to add a representative of the DVA as a co-chair and to increase the number of other interested parties from two to five. References to the UW School of Social Work are removed.

The Task Force duties are expanded to require recommendations regarding the creation and content of a web-based application to be shared by state agencies and primary care providers.

The application must provide information and resources on benefits, mental health resources, and lethal means safety information for veterans, military members, and their families.

The Task Force expiration is extended to July 1, 2024.

### Special License Plates.

A "Prevent Veteran Suicide" license plate emblem must be created and made available for purchase by the general public. The emblem must incorporate the Suicide Prevention Hotline in the design. The DOL may set a fee for purchase of the license plate. Revenues from the license plate sales must be deposited into the Veterans and Military Members Suicide Prevention Account.

### Veterans and Military Members Suicide Prevention Account.

The Veterans and Military Members Suicide Prevention Account (Account) is created in the treasury. Funds in the Account must be used for activities that are dedicated to the benefit of veteran and military member suicide education and prevention. The Account is funded through legislative appropriations, revenues received from the "Prevent Veteran Suicide" license plate, and gifts. Donations to the Account may be made by applicants for concealed pistol licenses or by individuals who are undergoing a background check in connection with the purchase of a firearm. The DVA must coordinate with local law enforcement, the DOL, and firearms dealers to develop a form and process to publicize and collect these voluntary donations.

### Suicide Prevention Community-Based Services Grant Program.

A Suicide Prevention Community-Based Services Grant Program (grant program) is created in the DVA. The purpose of the grant program is to provide suicide prevention, peer support, and other assistance to at-risk and transitioning veterans and military members and their families.

Grants may be awarded from the Account.

Subject to available funds, the DVA must consult with the University of Washington (UW) to establish a process for awarding the grants. The DVA must report annually to the Legislature, beginning in July 2022, on grants awarded and services provided. The UW must evaluate the effectiveness of the program recipients providing suicide prevention and peer support services.

#### Information Database and Training.

The DVA must create and maintain a database of information and resources that address the mental health and suicide prevention of veterans, military members, and their families. The DVA must also provide suicide prevention education training and information that is accessible online.

#### Safe Storage of Firearms.

Expansion of safe storage of firearms and reduced access to lethal means in the community is encouraged. A dealer who provides a service of allowing a person to temporarily store a firearm on the dealer's premises in a storage locker, box, or container that is locked and not accessible to the dealer does not thereby create a special relationship for civil liability purposes.

#### Health Care Provider Training.

Every primary care provider required to complete the suicide assessment, treatment, and management training must, when referring, treating, or managing a patient, inquire into whether the patient is a veteran, member of the military, or a family member or spouse of a veteran or member of the military.

#### Other.

The DCYF and the DSHS must, when providing services or upon application or intake for services or benefits:

- inquire whether the individual has ever served in the U.S. armed forces or is a family or household member of someone who has ever served in the U.S. armed forces; and
- if the answer is affirmative, provide information on how to contact the DVA to inquire about eligibility for available benefits, services, or programs.

Both departments must report non-identifying comprehensive data collected in response to this inquiry to the DVA annually.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 15, 2021.

**Effective Date:** This bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed, except for section 7, relating to the Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force, which takes effect immediately.