

SENATE BILL REPORT

E2SHB 1181

As of February 22, 2022

Title: An act relating to establishing programs and measures to prevent suicide among veterans and military members.

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

Sponsors: House Committee on Appropriations (originally sponsored by Representatives Orwall, Boehnke, Callan, Leavitt, Davis, Dolan, Valdez, Young, Riccelli, Lekanoff, Barkis, Peterson, Shewmake, Bronoske, Macri and Morgan).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/15/22, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Human Services, Reentry & Rehabilitation: 2/22/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes a Suicide Prevention Community-Based Services Grant Program at the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to fund programs for suicide prevention, peer support, and other assistance for veterans, military members, and their families.
- Directs DVA to create a database of resources for veterans and their families about mental health and suicide and to develop electronic means to disseminate this information.
- Requires all new public works programs after July 1, 2024, to include signs publicizing the 988 crisis hotline.
- Reestablishes the Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force at the DVA.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES, REENTRY & REHABILITATION

Staff: Kevin Black (786-7747)

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

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 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 was established in 2016 to raise public awareness and increase suicide prevention education. The task force was administered by the University of Washington (UW) School of Social Work. Task Force membership was comprised of representatives of suicide prevention organizations, the firearms industry, firearms rights organizations, law enforcement, health care professionals, and others. The task force membership was divided into a Suicide Prevention and Firearms Subcommittee and a Suicide Prevention and Health Care Subcommittee. The task force expired on July 1, 2021.

988 Crisis Hotline. The 988 behavioral health crisis response and suicide prevention line is a crisis line to be implemented on July 16, 2022, to consolidate behavioral health crisis and suicide prevention lifeline calls statewide. The calls are answered by trained professionals at crisis call center hubs. A Crisis Response Improvement Strategy Committee is meeting to make recommendations for the development of 988 and the improvement of the integrated behavioral health response system.

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 Providers. 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.

Summary of Bill: A Suicide Prevention Community-Based Services Grant Program is created in the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to provide suicide prevention, peer support, and other assistance to at-risk and transitioning veterans, military members, and their families. Subject to funding, DVA must establish a process to receive, review, process, and award grants to organizations that address this population. DVA must give priority to organizations using peer support models using evidence-based, research-based, or promising practices. The Forefront Suicide Prevention Center at the University of Washington (Forefront) must evaluate the effectiveness of grant recipients. DVA must report to the Legislature annually beginning July 1, 2023, concerning this program.

A Veterans and Military Members Suicide Prevention Account (Account) is created in the custody of the State Treasurer. DVA must control expenditures from this account, which must be used for activities that support veteran and military member suicide education and prevention.

The Governor's Challenge Team and Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families Advisory Committee must report biannually to the Legislature beginning December 2022 regarding implementation of their suicide prevention plan.

Subject to funding, DVA must create and maintain a database of information by July 1, 2023, on non-profit, for-profit, city, county, state and federal organizations and resources that address the mental health, well-being, and suicide prevention of veterans, military members, and their families. DVA must provide suicide prevention education training information which is accessible over the internet. By December 1, 2023, DVA must create a web-based application to provide applicable information and resources.

Subject to funding, the Department of Health (DOH) must consult with DVA to create educational materials for health care providers about the availability of the national 988 number for individuals in crisis and information about resources for veterans, including the veterans crisis line. DOH must distribute materials electronically to appropriate providers when they renew their licenses. DOH must encourage health providers to inquire whether new patients entering care are veterans, members of the military, or their family members and share this information.

Subject to funding, the Suicide-Safer Homes Task Force is reestablished until July 1, 2024, with staffing by DVA instead of the University of Washington, with the director of DVA and the director of Forefront or their designees serving as co-chairs. Forefront must provide technical and programmatic support and receive funding from the task force towards the purchase of lock boxes for dissemination through its TeleSAFER program.

The Department of Licensing must create a prevent veteran suicide emblem to be displayed on license plates for purchase by the public which incorporates the 988 suicide prevention

hotline. Revenues from sales of this emblem must be deposited in the Account.

The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) must inquire of applicants for public assistance benefits whether they have ever served in the U.S. military or are a family member of a person who has served. If the person answers in the affirmative, DSHS must provide the person with information how to contact DVA to inquire about eligible benefits.

A firearms dealer who allows a person to temporarily store a firearm on the dealer's premises in a locked storage locker, box, or container does not create a special relationship with the person who temporarily stores the firearm for the purposes of civil liability.

Any building, bridge, ferry, or park constructed or replaced after July 1, 2024, as a public works project must have installed in appropriate locations, signs displaying the 988 national suicide prevention and mental health crisis hotline. No permit is needed to install such a sign along a state highway but the Department of Transportation must approve the location.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available. New fiscal note requested on February 16, 2022.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill is about saving the lives of those who have served our country. We lose about 22 veterans per day to suicide. There are over 500,000 veterans in our state. Our state is part of the Governor's Challenge, led by DVA, which created a strategic plan to end veteran suicide. This bill embodies many goals of plan. The four main components are: (1) ask the question; (2) securing firearms and medications; (3) peer services; and (4) the 988 crisis hotline. The license plate emblems and signage will help create 988 awareness. Since 2008 Washington has averaged 220 veteran suicides per year. This bill creates clinical and non-clinical approaches. Mental health issues are an unwritten part of the job of a service member. Stigma means that asking for help can endanger your career, both while serving and in the civilian sector. Many veterans find it hard to ask for help. Washington has been a leader in suicide prevention. We can save a lot of lives. Lethal means safety seeks to address how people attempt suicide and has a strong evidence base behind it. Please renew the Suicide Safer Homes Task Force which has been very effective. This bill will streamline the task force, make it more effective, and introduce new members. I use peer support training in my life every day. Alternative programs separate from the VA bureaucracy are helpful for some veterans. The Department of Defense supports appropriate and timely work to ask the question. We need to identify veterans to provide better care and services. Opportunities are lost because the connection is not made. Veterans may not readily self-identify. Thirteen states have incorporated "ask the question" language in their laws. Opening up

funds to support organizations which help veterans and active duty service members will save lives. To see a veteran who has tried to kill themselves before they enter our program leave with hope, training, and knowledge is humbling. This bill will help family members and spouses of veterans. The Secretary of State supports the underlying bill and asks for an amendment to create an account with the State Treasurer to start the fundraising process for a memorial to those who died in the Global War on Terror.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Tina Orwall, Prime Sponsor; Sean Dalgarn, Growing Veterans; Tammie Perreault; Brett Bass, Forefront Suicide Prevention; Michael Badgley, Vanir Foundation; Shawn Durnen, NineLine Veteran Services; Tanja Struyck-Fogleman; Joanna Arlow; Jeremy Grisham, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs; Brian Hatfield, Office of Secretary of State.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.