

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STAFF ANALYSIS

BILL #: HB 687 Services for Veterans and Their Families

SPONSOR(S): Zika

TIED BILLS: **IDEN./SIM. BILLS:** SB 104

REFERENCE	ACTION	ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR or BUDGET/POLICY CHIEF
1) Local, Federal & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee	14 Y, 0 N	Renner	Miller
2) Health Care Appropriations Subcommittee			
3) State Affairs Committee			

SUMMARY ANALYSIS

Veterans throughout the United States face mental health and substance abuse issues. Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide affect between two and 17 percent of veterans returning from combat.

In 2014, the Legislature appropriated \$150,000 to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs (FDVA) to create a pilot program expanding existing Florida 211 Network (information and referral network) services to veterans in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee Counties. Through the pilot project, veterans receive information on available services, referrals to federal Veterans Affairs (VA) funded and other community-based services, and care coordination to verify that referrals lead to successful service connection.

The bill creates the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program (Program), to provide veterans and their families dedicated behavioral health care referral services, primarily for mental health and substance abuse. Through the Program, a veteran may call a separate veteran-dedicated support line to receive assistance and support from a fellow veteran trained to respond to the calls for assistance.

The bill requires the FDVA to establish the Program and contract with a nonprofit entity that has statewide phone capacity to serve veterans, is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, and is fully accredited by the Alliance of Information and Referral Services. The contracting entity will enter into agreements with Florida 211 Network participants to provide services to veterans.

The bill models the Program after the pilot program. The bill specifies goals, services, and follow-up requirements. The FDVA must compile data collected by the Florida 211 Network into a report for the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives by December 15, 2020.

The bill may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on state government. See Fiscal Impact Section.

The bill has an effective date of July 1, 2020.

FULL ANALYSIS

I. SUBSTANTIVE ANALYSIS

A. EFFECT OF PROPOSED CHANGES:

Present Situation

Veterans and Mental Health and/or Substance Abuse

Florida has the nation's third largest veteran population with more than 1.5 million veterans.¹ Veterans face unique challenges, and some struggle with mental health and substance abuse.

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event, including war or combat.² The National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), lists the percentage of veterans with PTSD by service era:

- Between 11 and 20 percent of veterans who served in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom were diagnosed with PTSD in a given year.
- About 12 percent of veterans who served in the Gulf War were diagnosed with PTSD in a given year.
- About 15 percent of veterans of the Vietnam War were diagnosed with PTSD at the time of the most recent study in the late 1980's. However, the National Center estimates that about 30 percent of veterans of the Vietnam War have had PTSD in their lifetimes.³

A strong association exists between PTSD and substance abuse disorders (SUD) amongst veterans. Statistics show:

- More than two in 10 veterans with PTSD also have SUD;
- Almost one in three veterans seeking treatment for SUD also have PTSD;
- About one in 10 veterans returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan seen at the VA have problems with alcohol or other drugs.⁴

Suicide rates for veterans continue to be a cause of national concern. More than 6,000 veterans committed suicide each year from 2008 to 2016. In 2016, the suicide rate was 1.5 times greater for veterans than for non-veteran adults, after adjusting for age and gender. From 2005 to 2016, the increase in suicide rate among veterans in Veterans Hospital Administration (VHA) care was lower than among veterans not in VHA care.⁵

Federal Veterans Crisis Line

The VA Veterans Crisis Line connects veterans and current servicemembers in crisis and their families and friends with information from qualified responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, and text messaging service.⁶

The Veterans Crisis Line launched in 2007. Over the course of the program, it has answered more than 4.4 million calls and initiated the dispatch of emergency services to callers in crisis more than 138,000

¹ Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Our Veterans, Fast Facts*, <http://floridavets.org/our-veterans/profilefast-facts/> (last visited Dec. 6, 2019).

² American Psychiatric Association, *What is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder?*, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

³ National Center for PTSD, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *How Common is PTSD in Veterans?*, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

⁴ National Center for PTSD, U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *PTSD and Substance Abuse in Veterans*, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/related/substance_abuse_vet.asp (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

⁵ Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, *VA National Suicide Data Report 2005-2016*, https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/OMHSP_National_Suicide_Data_Report_2005-2016_508.pdf (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

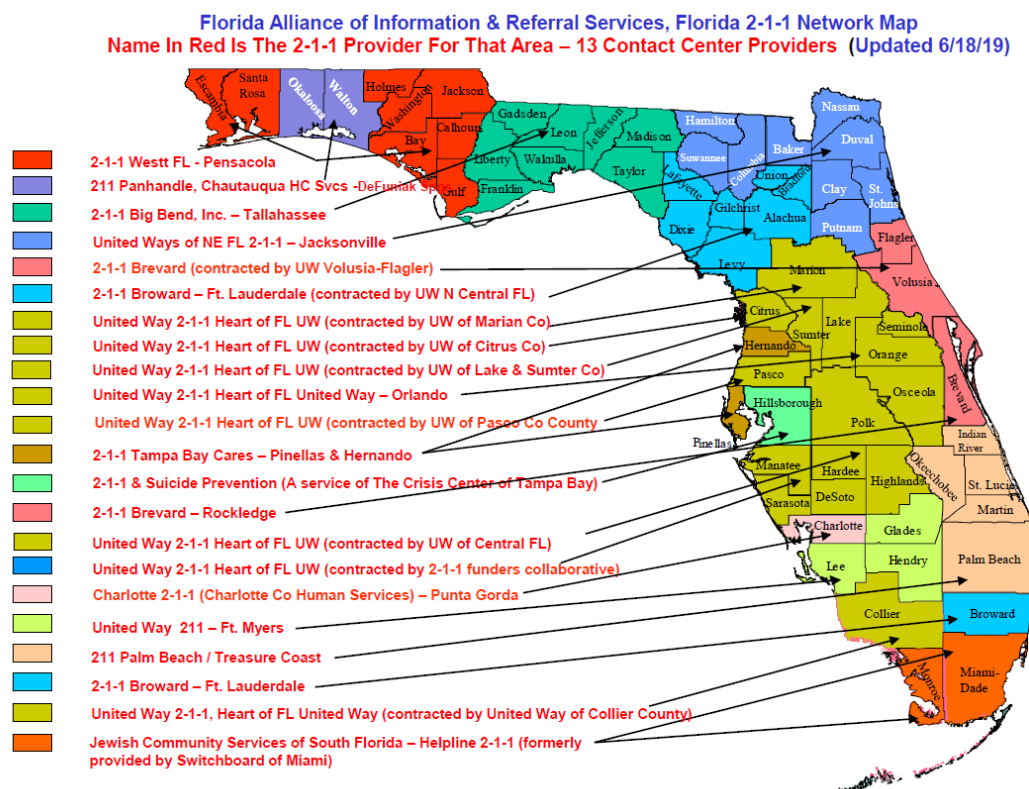
⁶ Veterans Crisis Line, *What to Expect*, <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/about/what-to-expect> (last visited Dec. 13, 2019).

times. In 2009, an anonymous online chat service was added. In 2011, a text-messaging service was also added to provide another way for veterans to connect with confidential, round-the-clock support.⁷

Florida 211 Network

A 211 network is a telephone-based service offered by nonprofit and public agencies throughout the United States that provides free and confidential information and referral services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The network helps callers identify and connect with health and human service programs that can meet a variety of needs, including food, housing, employment, health care, crisis counseling, and more.⁸

The Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services (FLAIRS) is the 211 collaborative organization for the state and is responsible for designing, studying, and implementing the Florida 211 Network.⁹ The Florida 211 Network¹⁰ operates as the single point of coordination for information and referral of health and human services.¹¹ These services are available statewide through any cell phone provider as well as through landlines in all 67 counties by dialing 2-1-1.¹² There are a total of thirteen Florida 211 Network certified providers, serving the areas shown below.¹³



To participate in the Florida 211 Network, a 211 provider must be fully accredited by the National Alliance of Information and Referral Services or have received approval to operate, pending accreditation from its affiliate, the FLAIRS.¹⁴

⁷ Veterans Crisis Line, *What It is*, <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/about/what-is-vcl> (last visited Dec. 13, 2019).

⁸ Florida 2-1-1 Association, <http://www.my211florida.org/> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

⁹ S. 408.918(3), F.S.

¹⁰ S. 408.918, F.S.

¹¹ S. 408.918(1), F.S.

¹² *Supra* note 6.

¹³ Florida Alliance of Information and Referral Services, *Map of 2-1-1 Centers*, <http://www.flairs.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2019/09/FL-211-providers-and-coverage-areas-061819.pdf> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

¹⁴ S. 408.918(2), F.S. The full accreditation process requires a remote database review, consultation component, on-site review, and demonstration of a call handling component, as well as payment of a membership fee. *See*

<https://www.airs.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3286> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

Council on Accreditation

The Council on Accreditation (COA) is an international accrediting entity that accredits private and public organizations and programs that provide human services.¹⁵ The COA specifically accredits entities providing child welfare, behavioral health, and community-based social services.¹⁶

Crisis Center of Tampa Bay Pilot Project

The 2014 Florida Legislature appropriated \$150,000 to create a pilot project expanding existing 211 services to veterans in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee counties.¹⁷ In August 2014, the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay (CCTB), through the pilot project, expanded its services to veterans and launched the Florida Veterans Support Line (1-844-MYFLVET) in November 2014.¹⁸ The expanded service is veteran-specific and peer-based. By calling the Florida Veterans Support Line, veterans in the Tampa Bay region are able to speak with a fellow veteran, called a Peer-to-Peer Coordinator, and offered:

- Comprehensive information and referral to VA-funded services and other community-based services;
- Assistance and support provided by a peer who has experienced the transition from military back to civilian life; and
- Care coordination services, including system navigation, advocacy, and ongoing support.¹⁹

During the Fiscal Year 2014-2015²⁰, the CCTB pilot project handled 1,135 total calls; of those, 925 calls were referred to care coordination services, as shown below.²¹

Call Origin:	Contact Made By:	Veteran Status:	Current Use of VA Services:	Presenting Need:	Type of Service Referred:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer from other 211 Line: 853 (75.2%) • Florida Veterans Support Line: 257 (22.6%) • Walk-In/ Event: 25 (2.2%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self: 926 (81.6%) • Friend/Relative: 168 (14.8%) • Organization: 38 (3.3%) • Other: 3 (0.3%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran: 973 (85.7%) • Retired: 47 (4.1%) • Former Military (<180 Days): 20 (1.8%) • Active Duty: 20 (1.8%) • Reserve: 16 (1.4%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: 530 (46.7%) • No: 316 (27.8%) • Unknown: 273 (24.1%) • Refused: 16 (1.4%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Assistance: 292 (25.7%) • Substance Abuse Counseling: 221 (19.5%) • Shelter: 131 (11.5%) • Legal Services: 97 (8.5%) • Mental Health Counseling: 79 (7%) • Emotional Support: 66 (5.8%) • Suicide Related: 63 (5.6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Coordination Services: 626 (55.2%) • Other Community Resources: 590 (52%) • VA Services: 294 (25.9%) • Community Mental Health Services: 270 (23.8%) • No referral made: 210 (18.5%)

During Fiscal Years 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, the CCTB pilot program handled 7,343 calls, as shown below.²²

Age	Gender	Branch	Relationship to Service Member:	Veteran Status:	Current Use of VA Services:	Greatest Needs:
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¹⁵ Council on Accreditation, <http://coanet.org/home/> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

¹⁶ Council on Accreditation, *About COA*, <http://coanet.org/about/whats-new/about-coa/> (last visited Dec. 9, 2019).

¹⁷ Specific appropriation 595 of HB 5001, 2014-2015 General Appropriations Act.

¹⁸ Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Overview of Current Funding*. (On file with Local, Federal & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee).

¹⁹ Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Florida Veterans Support Line, What we offer*, <https://www.myflvet.com/about-1> (last visited Dec. 10, 2019).

²⁰ The CCTB pilot program operates with an October-September fiscal year. Its first operating year began on October 28, 2014.

²¹ Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Florida Veterans Support Line 1-844-MYFLVET: Fiscal Year 2015 Report* (On file with Local, Federal & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee).

²² Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *1-844-MYFLVET: Demographic Data FY 2016 and FY 2017* (On file with Local, Federal & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 and Under: 6% • 26-35: 16% • 36-45: 14% • 46-55: 22% • 56-65: 20% • Over 65: 15% • Refused: 8% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female: 32% • Male: 67% • Refused: 1% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Air Force: 12% • Army: 45% • Coast Guard: 1% • Marines: 10% • Navy: 17% • Refused: 15% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self: 68% • Spouse: 13% • Child/Dependent: 7% • Relative: 7% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veteran: 70% • Retired: 9% • Former Military (<180 Days): 6% • Active Duty: 3% • Reserve: 2% • National Guard: 1% • Refused: 8% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes: 44% • No: 36% • Refused: 20% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral Health: 59% (Suicide: 35%) • Financial Assistance: 40% • Employment: 1%
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During Fiscal Years 2017-2018, there were 28,962 veterans served; 49,932 services referred; 396 suicide concerns; and 880 veterans served in Care Coordination.²³

Expansion of the Florida Veterans Support Line

In 2017, the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA) provided the CCTB with one-time funding of \$400,000 for a statewide expansion of the Florida Veterans Support Line. The CCTB used the funding to train 211 providers and to implement a marketing campaign to raise awareness for the support line. This funding was not used to expand the Peer-to-Peer Coordination component from the pilot project.²⁴

In 2018, the VA provided partial funding for a statewide expansion of the Peer-to-Peer Coordination component of \$1,000,000 for September 2018 through September 2019. This funding has a multi-year option at about \$1,000,000 per year for an additional three years until September 2022.²⁵ The VA activated the second-year option beginning September 28, 2019.²⁶ The third year will be determined in June 2020. Additionally, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) provided \$538,000 for operations from February 1, 2019 through June 30, 2019.²⁷ The DCF activated a second-year option beginning July 1, 2019, expiring September 30, 2020, for \$1,000,000.²⁸

Effect of the Bill

The bill creates the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program (Program) as a statewide program to provide veterans and their families dedicated behavioral health care referral services, primarily for mental health and substance abuse.

The bill requires the FDVA to establish the Program. The FDVA must contract with a nonprofit entity that has statewide phone capacity to serve veterans and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation and fully accredited by the National Alliance of Information and Referral Services. The entity will enter into agreements with Florida 211 Network participants to provide services to veterans.

The Program must be modeled after the pilot program established in 2014 by the CCTB and the FDVA in Hillsborough, Pasco, Pinellas, Polk, and Manatee Counties.

Goals of the program are to:

- Prevent suicide by veterans;
- Increase the use by veterans of programs and services provided by the VA; and
- Increase the number of veterans who use other available community-based programs and services.

Program services will include:

- Telephonic peer support, crisis intervention, and information on referral resources;

²³ Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, *Overview of the 1-844-MYFLVET Support Line* (On file with Local, Federal & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee staff).

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.*

²⁶ Email from Sunny Hall, Vice President of Client Services, Crisis Center of Tampa Bay, RE: funding. (Dec. 10, 2019) (On file with Local, Federal & Veterans Affairs Subcommittee staff).

²⁷ *Supra* note 23.

²⁸ *Supra* note 26.

- Treatment coordination, including coordination of follow-up care;
- Assessment of suicide risk as part of an immediate needs assessment, including safety planning and support; and
- Resource coordination, including data analysis, to facilitate acceptance, enrollment, and attendance of veterans and their families in programs and services provided by the VA and other available community-based programs and services.

The bill requires Program teams to:

- Track the number of requests from veterans or family members;
- Follow up with callers to determine if they have pursued referrals and whether additional help is needed;
- Implement communication strategies to educate veterans and their families about programs and services provided by the VA and other community-based programs and services; and
- Document all calls and capture necessary data to improve outreach to veterans and their families and report such data to the contracted entity.

Florida 211 network participants must establish and maintain a database of services available locally. Both the FDVA and its contractor must work with managing entities to educate service providers about the Florida Veterans Support Line and the Program.

Florida 211 Network participants must provide all collected data to the FDVA. By December 15, 2021, the FDVA must submit a report to the Governor, President of the Senate, and Speaker of the House of Representatives. The report must include:

- The nature, number, and outcome of each call received;
- Demographic information on each caller; and
- Follow-up by the Program team, including timeliness and positive outcomes, as well as the caller's level of satisfaction with Program services.

B. SECTION DIRECTORY:

Section 1 Creates s. 394.9087, F.S., relating to the establishment of the Florida Veterans' Care Coordination Program.

Section 2 Provides an effective date of July 1, 2020.

II. FISCAL ANALYSIS & ECONOMIC IMPACT STATEMENT

A. FISCAL IMPACT ON STATE GOVERNMENT:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

See Fiscal Comments.

B. FISCAL IMPACT ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

1. Revenues:

None.

2. Expenditures:

None.

C. DIRECT ECONOMIC IMPACT ON PRIVATE SECTOR:

Veterans and their families may financially benefit from having greater access to treatments and services specifically designed for veterans with mental health or substance abuse issues.

D. FISCAL COMMENTS:

The bill requires the FDVA to provide statewide-dedicated behavioral healthcare referral service to mental health and substance abuse services for veterans and their families through the state's 211 Network. The cost of the Program may have an indeterminate negative fiscal impact on state government. Similar bills have been filed in past legislative sessions and have been estimated to require an appropriation of \$2 million in recurring General Revenue funds to implement the Program.²⁹

III. COMMENTS

A. CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES:

1. Applicability of Municipality/County Mandates Provision:

Not applicable. The bill does not appear to affect county or municipal governments.

2. Other:

None.

B. RULE-MAKING AUTHORITY:

The bill neither authorizes nor requires administrative rulemaking by executive branch agencies.

C. DRAFTING ISSUES OR OTHER COMMENTS:

None.

IV. AMENDMENTS/ COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE CHANGES

None.

²⁹ The analyses for HBs 1193 (2015), HB 269 (2016), HB 179 (2018), HB 365 (2019) all estimated an appropriation of \$2 million to implement the Program.