

# **WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

## **2022 REGULAR SESSION**

### **Committee Substitute**

**for**

### **Senate Bill 598**

BY SENATORS BLAIR (MR. PRESIDENT) AND BALDWIN

(BY REQUEST OF THE EXECUTIVE)

[Originating in the Committee on Military; reported on

February 16, 2022]



1 A BILL to amend the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, by adding thereto a new article,  
2 designated §9A-5-1, §9A-5-2, and §9A-5-3, all relating to specifically authorizing programs  
3 to assist at-risk veterans through partnerships with service organizations, government  
4 agencies, military organizations, or private entities engaged with their local veteran  
5 communities to connect veterans and their families with existing resources to combat  
6 suicide, and its contributing factors, among the veteran population in this state; providing  
7 legislative fundings and purpose; authorizing programs to assist at-risk veterans through  
8 partnerships with service organizations to combat suicide and its contributing factors  
9 among the veteran population; and providing for funding and grant-making from the  
10 Department of Veterans' Assistance to partner service organizations, government  
11 agencies, military organizations, or private entities and for the purposes of this article.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

**ARTICLE 5. AID TO AT-RISK VETERANS.**

**§9A-5-1. Legislative finding and purpose.**

1 (a) The Legislature hereby finds that there exists a health care crisis among our state's  
2 veterans and their families, with veterans in this state dying by suicide at a rate of nearly 60  
3 percent higher than nonveterans.

4 (b) The Legislature finds there are significant resources available to help combat this  
5 crisis, but that these resources are not well-known or easily available to veterans and their  
6 families.

7 (c) The Legislature hereby specifically authorizes and directs the Department of Veterans'  
8 Assistance to develop and implement programs to assist at-risk veterans, including establishing  
9 partnerships with veteran service organizations, government agencies, military organizations,  
10 private entities, and mental health providers engaged with their local veteran communities to  
11 connect veterans and their families with existing resources to combat suicide, and its contributing  
12 factors, among the veteran population in this state.

**§9A-5-2. Assistance to at-risk veterans; partnerships.**

1           (a) As used in this article, “at-risk veteran” means a person who is currently serving in the  
2 armed forces on active duty, reserve status, or in the National Guard, or a person who served on  
3 active duty, reserve status, or in the National Guard, or who was discharged, and who may be at  
4 risk of suicide owing to a physical or mental health condition that is related to his or her service.

5           (b) In addition to the duties and powers otherwise provided to the department under this  
6 chapter, the department shall develop and implement programs to assist at-risk veterans and their  
7 families combat suicide and its contributing factors.

8           (c) The department may enter into partnerships or agreements with veteran service  
9 organizations, government agencies, military organizations, private entities, and mental health  
10 providers engaged with their local veteran communities to provide or connect veterans and their  
11 families to resources that may be available through any source, including state, federal, or private  
12 resources.

13           (d) The department shall provide for the annual education of its employees on the warning  
14 signs of suicide and the resources available to assist in suicide prevention. This education may  
15 be accomplished through an employee’s self-review of suicide prevention materials and  
16 resources approved by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

**§9A-5-3. Grant-making authority.**

1           (a) In addition to all other funding allocated to the department, the secretary is directed to  
2 seek funds, grants, and other sources of assistance from other agencies of government, as well  
3 as the private sector to accomplish the purposes of this article.

4           (b) The secretary, in his or her discretion, may make grants or otherwise transfer funds  
5 held by the department from any available source to provide assistance to at-risk veterans or their  
6 families, including by providing funding to veteran service organizations, government agencies,  
7 military organizations, private entities, and mental health providers, for the purposes of this article.

- 8            (c) The department shall maintain records of any monies transferred or expended under  
9 this article and shall comply with all relevant reporting requirements.