DRAFT BILL

The DEPARTMENT mentioned in the bill is to be determined. Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs? State Health Department? County Health Departments? Military Affairs?

SECTION 1 (TITLE):

This act shall be known as the Kentucky Veterans Bill of Rights to prevent veterans suicide.

SECTION 2 (PURPOSE): To help strengthen and coordinate proven suicide prevention programs and connect more veterans and their families to mental health services.

SECTION 3 (PROVISIONS):

(1) The DEPARTMENT partners with mental health providers and advocates to prevent veteran suicide and increase veterans access to mental health services.

 (a) Ensure veterans and their families have access to mental health treatment, including for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide and suicide ideation.

 (b) In coordination with DEPARTMENT partners in local, state, and federal government agencies, and in consultation with Kentucky Governor's Challenge Team, nonprofits, service providers including Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs and County Health Departments, and cities that have effective prevention and treatment systems for mental health, shall develop and implement a strategy to reduce barriers to access mental health services and treatment for veterans and their families including by:

(2) Resolving all barriers identified in (1) that can be resolved without legislative or budgetary action, including through increased coordination between partner DEPARTMENT and non-profit providers and the federal government, identify community-based approaches for at risk veterans at large and develop applications for and use of private and federal grants, and other actions; and

(3) Report annually to the Legislature, Governor and on Department's website of additional legislative or budgetary steps that would resolve barriers identified in (1) that have not been resolved by the steps taken in (2).

(4) Provide technical assistance to communities to develop strategic plans to reduce veteran suicide, including through coordination and participation by local leaders, faith communities, schools, workplaces, and other stakeholders; and

(5) Evaluate community strategic plans within all DEPARTMENT partnerships and disseminate learnings and best practices to optimize the impact of efforts by all DEPARTMENT partners and stakeholders.

SECTION 4 (CONNECT)

(1) The DEPARTMENT connects veterans to trained mental health care providers, including those trained in veteran suicide prevention and:

 (a) The DEPARTMENT creates a centralized provider database, identifying by region mental health providers with expertise and ability to assist veterans and their families, including to highlight providers with training or experience in the prevention and treatment of veteran suicide.

 (b) Using existing resources, and incorporating best practices and research from the Department of Veterans Affairs, Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs and non-profit service providers in Kentucky, the DEPARTMENT shall develop a continuing education course for mental health providers in Kentucky to obtain expertise in veteran suicide assessment, prevention, treatment and risk management and make that program available for free to providers in all regions of the state lacking sufficient trained providers.

 (c) The DEPARTMENT shall identify evidence-based best practices to increase awareness of any veteran suicide prevention hotline in Kentucky or nationally, and other crisis resources with proven effectiveness to reduce veteran suicide such as "Green Alert" legislation signed into Kentucky law by the Governor in 2019.