P1 1lr3065 CF 1lr0022

By: Delegate Rogers

AN ACT concerning

Introduced and read first time: February 19, 2021 Assigned to: Rules and Executive Nominations

A BILL ENTITLED

| 2 3 | Veterans Affairs – Office of Communications and Public Affairs – Veterans Advocacy and Education Act | | | |
|--------|---|--|--|--|
| 4 | FOR the purpose of altering the name of the Outreach and Advocacy Program in the | | | |
| 5 | Department of Veterans Affairs to be the Office of Communications and Public | | | |
| 6 | Affairs; requiring the Office, in collaboration with the Maryland Higher Education | | | |
| 7 | Commission, to actively help veterans and their dependents become aware of and | | | |
| 8 | access certain benefits; altering certain responsibilities of the director of the Office; | | | |
| 9 | repealing a certain requirement that the Department develop and maintain a certain | | | |
| 10 | database of veterans in the State; altering certain responsibilities of the Department; | | | |
| 11 | altering certain responsibilities of the Office; altering the content of a certain annual | | | |
| 12 | report; making stylistic changes; and generally relating to the Office of | | | |
| 13 | Communications and Public Affairs. | | | |
| 14 | BY repealing and reenacting, with amendments, | | | |
| 15 | Article – State Government | | | |
| 16 | Section 9-940 through 9-944 to be under the amended part "Part V. Office of | | | |
| 17 | Communications and Public Affairs"; and 9–946 | | | |

20 SECTION 1. BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND,

21 That the Laws of Maryland read as follows:

Annotated Code of Maryland

Article - State Government

(2014 Replacement Volume and 2020 Supplement)

Part V. [Outreach and Advocacy Program] **OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS**.

25 9–940.

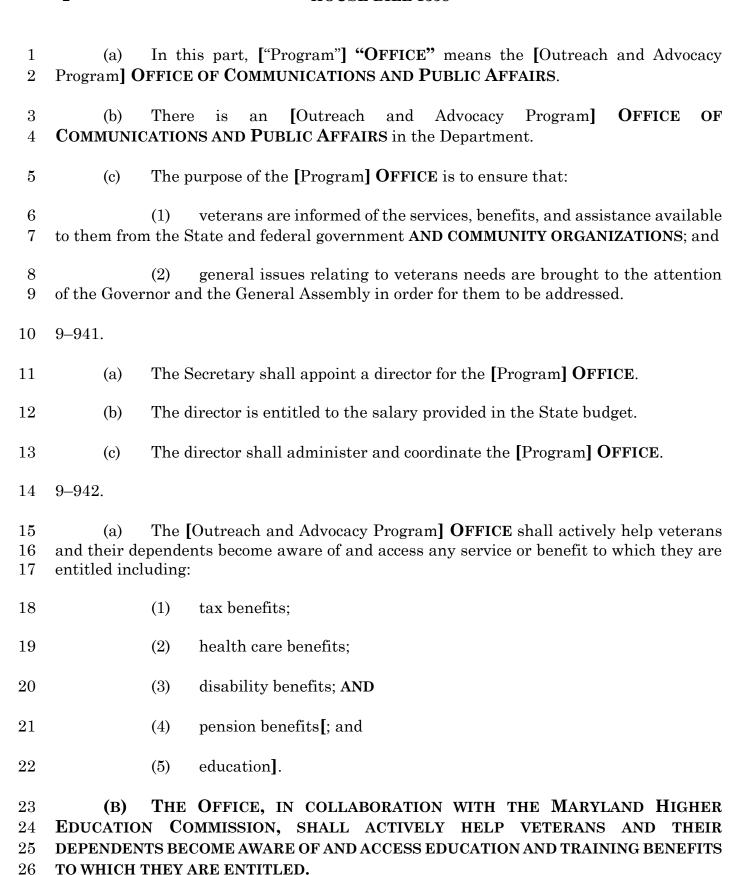
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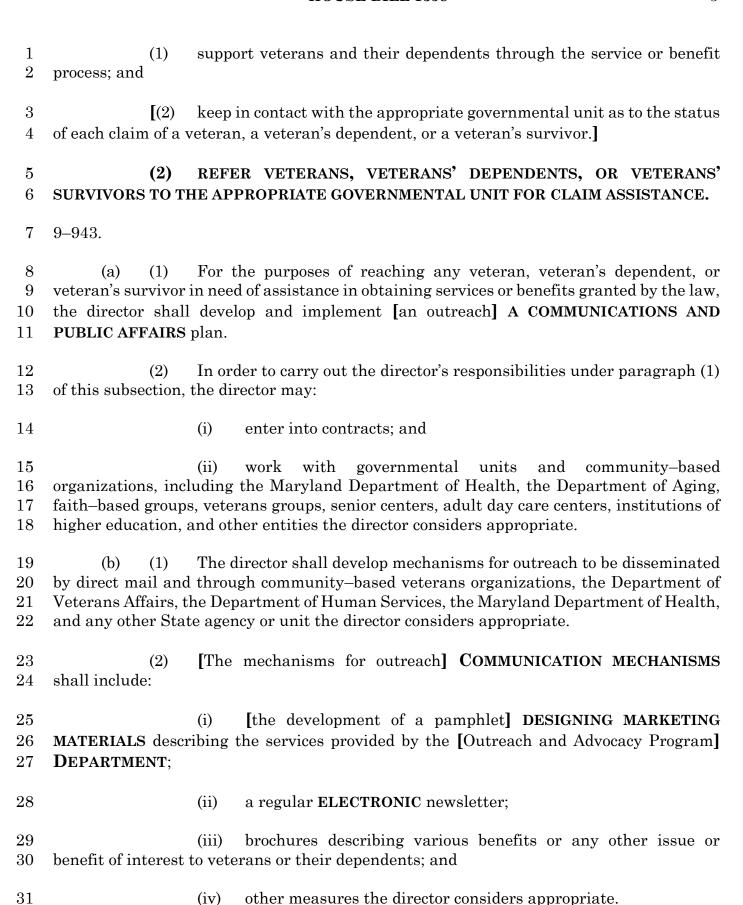
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[(b)] **(**C**)**



The director of the [Program] **OFFICE** shall:



- 1 (c) The Department shall [develop and maintain a database of veterans in the 2 State] COMMUNICATE WELCOME HOME INFORMATION TO VETERANS RETURNING TO 3 THE STATE.
- 4 (d) The Department, in conjunction with the types of community-based 5 organizations listed in subsection (a)(2) of this section, shall develop [a survey] 6 COMMUNICATION TOOLS to assist in identifying veterans and dependents who may be eligible for [pension programs] BENEFITS AND PROGRAMS OFFERED BY THE 8 DEPARTMENT.
- 9 (e) The [Program] **OFFICE** shall:
- 10 (1) [in conjunction with other governmental units and community-based groups, seek out veterans and their dependents who may be eligible for pension program benefits; and] MANAGE THE MARYLAND VETERANS SERVICE ANIMAL PROGRAM AND FUND ESTABLISHED UNDER PART VIII OF THIS SUBTITLE;
- 14 (2) [provide wounded or disabled veterans with information on available 15 services and benefits and support in obtaining these services and benefits] COORDINATE 16 THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF VETERANS' SERVICES SPECIALISTS DESIGNATED UNDER 17 § 9–944 OF THIS PART; AND
- 18 (3) MANAGE DEPARTMENT MEDIA RELATIONS, WEB CONTENT, 19 SOCIAL MEDIA, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS, CUSTOMER SERVICE 20 TRAINING, AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS.
- 21 (F) THE DIRECTOR SHALL SERVE, AS NECESSARY, AS THE SECRETARY'S 22 DESIGNEE TO APPROPRIATE COMMISSIONS, WORKGROUPS, AND COUNCILS.
- 23 9-944.

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- 24 (a) In this section, "specialist" means an employee designated by a governmental unit who is responsible for responding to and assisting veterans who are employed by the unit or who contact the unit for assistance.
- 27 (b) Each governmental unit shall:
- 28 (1) designate an employee of the unit, who to the extent practicable is a 29 veteran, as a veterans' services specialist for the unit and whose duties include the 30 coordination of veterans' services with the Department;
- 31 (2) provide the Department with any nonprotected or nonprivate 32 information about services the unit provides to veterans; and
 - (3) post on the unit's [Web site] **WEBSITE**:

| 1 | (i) all services available for veterans from the unit; | | |
|----------------|--|--|--|
| 2 3 | (ii) the contact information for the unit's veterans' services specialist; and | | |
| 4 5 | (iii) a link to the Department with the contact information for the director of the [Outreach and Advocacy Program in the Department] OFFICE . | | |
| 6 | (c) The veterans' services specialist shall: | | |
| 7 8 | (1) coordinate the provision of veterans' services available through the unit with the Department; and | | |
| 9 10 | (2) attend annual training that the Department provides concerning the coordination of veterans' services. | | |
| 11 12 13 | (d) On request for services by a veteran, a governmental unit that does not provide services to veterans shall direct the veteran to contact the Department and provide the veteran with the Department contact information. | | |
| 14 | (e) The Department shall: | | |
| 15 16 17 | (1) coordinate a meeting each quarter, or as otherwise necessary, with governmental units to discuss and receive information concerning the implementation of the requirements of this section; and | | |
| 18 19 20 | (2) on or before January 15 each year, report on the implementation of the requirements of this section to the Governor and, in accordance with $\S 2-1257$ of this article, the General Assembly. | | |
| 21 | Part VI. Reporting. | | |
| 22 | 9–946. | | |
| 23 24 | The Secretary shall submit a report by December 31 of each year to the Governor and, in accordance with $\S~2-1257$ of this article, the General Assembly, that includes: | | |
| 25 | (1) the number of: | | |
| 26 | (i) requests for help in obtaining benefits; [and] | | |
| 27 28 29 | (ii) [veterans, veterans' dependents, and veterans' survivors helped] PUBLIC CONTACTS MADE by the [Outreach and Advocacy Program by category] OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS; | | |

| 1 2 | [(2) the leading category; | penefits obtained through the Outreach and Advocacy Program by |
|----------|---|---|
| 3 4 | (3) the a recipient to access healt | everage length of time it takes to process benefit requests and for a h benefits;] |
| 5 6 | (III) HEALTH ADMINISTRA | |
| 7 | (IV) | VETERANS RECEIVING BENEFITS; |
| 8 | [(4)] (2) by qualified individuals | the average amount of disability and pension benefits received in this State compared to individuals in other states; |
| 10 11 | [(5) a de Advocacy Program; | tailed description of the outreach plan in the Outreach and |
| 12 13 | (6)] (3) program] THE OFFICE | an account of the costs of operating [the Outreach and Advocacy OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS; |
| 14 15 | [(7)] (4) level of resources availa | a status of the accomplishments for, efficacy of, efficiency of, and ble for each of the following programs: |
| 16 | (i) | cemetery; |
| 17 | (ii) | memorial; |
| 18 | (iii) | service; |
| 19 | (iv) | veterans homes; [and] |
| 20 | [(v) | outreach and advocacy;] |
| 21 | (v) | OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS; |
| 22 23 | (VI) FUND; AND | MARYLAND VETERANS SERVICE ANIMAL PROGRAM AND |
| 24 | (VII) | VETERANS' SERVICES SPECIALISTS; |
| 25 | [(8)] (5) | a general assessment of the status of veterans in the State; |
| 26 27 | [(9)] (6) have on the needs of vet | the estimated impact current military operations are likely to erans in the future; |

- 1 **[**(10)**] (7)** the status of federal veterans programs as they relate to 2 Maryland veterans; and
- 3 [(11)] (8) any other issues concerning veterans that the Secretary 4 considers appropriate.
- $\,\,$ SECTION 2. AND BE IT FURTHER ENACTED, That this Act shall take effect July $\,\,$ 1, 2021.