

Legislative Analysis



OFFICE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

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<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

House Bill 5276 (proposed substitute H-1)
Sponsor: Rep. Jennifer A. Conlin

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

House Bill 5277 (proposed substitute H-1)
Sponsor: Rep. Christine Morse

House Bill 5279 (proposed substitute H-1)
Sponsor: Rep. Felicia Brabec

House Bill 5280 (proposed substitute H-1)
Sponsor: Rep. William Bruck

House Bill 5720 as introduced
Sponsor: Rep. Robert J. Bezotte

Committee: Military, Veterans and Homeland Security
Complete to 5-14-24

SUMMARY:

House Bills 5276, 5277, 5279, 5280, and 5720 would address veteran mental health and substance use disorders as follows:

- House Bill 5276 would create a new act to create the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA).
- House Bill 5277 would amend the Michigan Military Act to allow the Michigan Veterans Affairs agency to enter into an interagency agreement with the Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) to conduct statewide outreach on mental health and substance abuse support resources for servicemembers and their families.
- House Bill 5279 would amend the Michigan Military Act to create a buddy-to-buddy program.
- House Bill 5280 would amend the Michigan Military Act to require the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) to develop a program called the Transition Bridge Program to help servicemembers and veterans focus on mental health, well-being, and suicide prevention.
- House Bill 5720 would create a new act to require the DMVA to ensure that mental health and wellness resources are available to members of the National Guard and other military services.

None of the bills could take effect unless all of them were enacted.

House Bill 5276 would create a new act, the Protecting Veterans Mental Health Act, which would create the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. The director of the agency would have to appoint an individual with career experience in veterans' mental health and substance use disorders as the manager of the office. The director could assign responsibilities to the manager in addition to those provided in the act. The manager would report to any official designated by the director and would not be exempt from state classified civil service.

Responsibilities of the manager

In addition to any other responsibilities granted to the office manager by the MVAA director, the manager would have to oversee and supervise the Transition Bridge program created under HB 5280 and, in conjunction with DHHS, the interagency agreement on mental health resources created under HB 5277.

The manager could, at their discretion and with the approval of the MVAA director, delegate day-to-day administrative or operational functions of the programs to other officials in the MVAA or DMVA. However, the manager would retain the duties of supervising, data collecting, and reporting (as described below) and would have to give final approval for implementing and changing the programs and those assigned to the manager by the MVAA director.

The manager would serve as the public point of contact for servicemembers, veterans, and the families of servicemembers, veterans, and other stakeholders on mental health, suicide prevention, and related resources and information throughout Michigan's servicemember and veteran populations. The manager would also have to be a primary point of contact within the MVAA and DMVA to ensure that programs, resources, and outreach efforts by the MVAA or DMVA related to mental health and suicide prevention are designed and implemented in a manner that ensures the efforts are able to increase awareness and improve outcomes for servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

Data collecting

The bill would require the office to collect data on all of the following in Michigan:

- Veteran mental health and substance use disorders, including statistics related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries, substance use disorder and addiction, and suicide and suicidal ideation.
- Efforts by DMVA to address veteran mental health and substance use disorders described above.
- Efforts undertaken and data collected through the interagency agreement with DHHS under HB 5277.
- The yearly strategic goals of the office.
- Use of the buddy-to-buddy program created under HB 5279.

Any data collected under the act could not include personally identifying information.

The office would have to ensure, to the best of its ability, that data collected under the act is timely and accurate, including data collected by the office for programs run by the office, MVAA, or DMVA, or data aggregated by reputable sources outside those entities.

Resource guide

The office would have to create and publish a mental health and wellness resource guide and make it available at no cost upon request. The resource guide would have to include all of the following:

- A self-assessment and scoring rubric (described below).
- Available mental health treatment resources and the following information for each listed organization or provider:
 - Its name, address, and phone number.

- Its website and email address, if applicable.
- A brief summary of services and resources it provides.
- A mental health signs and symptoms checklist.

The office could list any resource it considers beneficial in the resource guide, but it could not include only resources connected directly or indirectly to the MVAA or DMVA. The office would have to update the resource as it considers necessary, but at least once every three years.

Self-assessment and scoring rubric

The office would have to adopt a mental health self-assessment and scoring rubric that includes questions that allow a military servicemember or veteran to have an easy-to-understand and basic view of their current mental health status. The self-assessment would also need to contain a disclaimer that it is for informational purposes only and does not replace a full evaluation conducted by a licensed mental health or medical professional. The office could use an existing product as the self-assessment and scoring rubric if it meets the requirements of the bill, or it could design and create one that meets those requirements.

In addition to including the self-assessment and scoring rubric in the resource guide, the office could offer it as a stand-alone resource at no cost.

Annual report

By March 1 of each year, the office would have to submit a report to the director of the agency and the standing committees of the house of representatives and the senate on military and veterans affairs on the data it has collected as described above. In addition, the office would have to specify the number of resource guides it distributes each year and the types of organizations where the resource guides are distributed based on the following (or similar) categories:

- Veteran service organizations.
- Local units of government.
- Nonprofit organizations.
- State or federal departments or agencies.
- Department or agency sections.
- For-profit businesses or organizations.
- Other.

Other provisions

The office could, upon appropriation, administer grants to local units of government, nonprofit organizations, or other entities as per the director of the agency, in support of programs and resources for servicemembers and veterans consistent with the act.

A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of or retained by the agency, department of office in the performance of an official function that contains information specific to an individual member or veteran is not subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

House Bill 5277 would amend the Michigan Military Act to allow the MVAA to enter into an interagency agreement in cooperation with DHHS to do all of the following:

- Conduct statewide outreach on mental health and substance abuse support resources for servicemembers, veterans, and their families.
- Develop resources and materials to help families identify changes in a servicemember's or veteran's mental health, including substance disorders.
- Collect the information described in House Bill 5276.

The MVAA would have to create and operate a program that provides resources and support for the families of servicemembers and veterans on navigating mental health and substance use disorders, and it could utilize an electronic or mobile platform to connect veterans, servicemembers, and their families to available services and resources under the interagency agreement described above.

A writing prepared, owned, used, possessed, or retained by the MVAA or DHHS in the performance of an official function that contains information specific to an individual member or veteran would not be subject to disclosure under FOIA.

Proposed MCL 32.822

House Bill 5279 would amend the Michigan Military Act to require the MVAA to create and operate a buddy-to-buddy program to offer personal one-on-one mentorship and support to currently serving members of the military including the Michigan National Guard or military reserves, and veterans residing in Michigan. The MVAA director would have to designate an official in the agency to oversee the program's implementation and operation. The program would have to include at least connecting individuals, through volunteer veteran mentors, to benefits and resources related to education, employment, family-related issues, financial matters and health care, as well as connecting them to advocates and veteran navigators who can help with mental health and substance use disorders.

An individual who is not a veteran could serve as a mentor in the program. However, the MVAA would have to make every reasonable effort to recruit veterans to served as mentors for the program.

MVAA could receive funding for the program from any source.

A writing prepared, owned, used, possessed, or retained by the MVAA or the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in the performance of an official function that contains information specific to an individual member or veteran would not be subject to disclosure under FOIA.

Proposed MCL 32.823

House Bill 5280 would amend the Michigan Military Act to require DMVA to develop a program called the Transition Bridge program for servicemembers and veterans focused on mental health, well-being, and suicide prevention. The manager of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention would oversee and supervise the program.

DMVA could develop the program in conjunction with one or more government agencies or appropriate nonprofit organization that have the primary mission of providing a holistic, individualized approach to mental health and well-being through traditional and nontraditional means. DMVA could also work with any stakeholders it considers necessary for the successful design and launch of the program and contract with an appropriate government agency or nonprofit organization to operate the program.

The following would apply to the program:

- The program would have to include information on at least all of the following:
 - Warning signs for post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance use disorder, and suicide and suicidal ideation.
 - Traditional mental health treatment resources offered to veterans.
 - Alternative treatment options offered by federally licensed research centers.
 - Additional alternative forms of treatment.
 - Bridging the divide between military and civilian life and finding purpose in civilian life.
- The program would have to be offered no fewer than four times a year and in a manner similar to other military transition programs under federal law.
- Any individual who is an *eligible member* could participate in the program. An eligible member could enroll and complete the program by no later than one year after their separation from military service. However, the manager of the office could waive this requirement.
- The manager of the office would have to make every effort to ensure that the program is available to each eligible member within two months before, and two months after, their separation date from military service.

Eligible member would mean an individual who resides in the state and is currently serving in, or is a veteran of any one of the following:

- Michigan National Guard.
- The United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, or Coast Guard, including the reserve components, as an active duty or reserve member.
- The *other uninformed services*, as a commissioned officer.

Other uninformed services would mean the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps and the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

DMVA would have to make the mental health and wellness resource guide created under House Bill 5276 available to enrolled participants in the program.

DMVA would have to conduct outreach to offer the program to all members of the Michigan National Guard who are exiting military service into civilian life.

Any data collected under the bill could not include personally identifying information.

A writing prepared, owned, used, possessed, or retained by the DMVA or the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in performance of official function that contains information specific to an individual servicemember would not be subject to disclosure under FOIA.

Proposed MCL 32.821

House Bill 5720 would create a new act, the Michigan National Guard Access to Resources Act, to require the DMVA to ensure that mental health and wellness resources are available to members of the National Guard and other military services.

Specifically, the department would have to ensure that members of the Michigan National Guard, and other military servicemembers residing in Michigan, have access to the mental health and wellness resources guide created under House Bill 5276 at no cost in either or both of the following formats:

- Print, in an easily accessible location or on request.
- Electronically, on the department's website.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The bills would result in new annual costs to the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency under the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The additional costs would not be able to be supported by existing ongoing appropriations. The primary costs of the bills would be related to hiring staff, including the manager, to administer the responsibilities of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. Personnel costs are estimated at approximately \$500,000. Actual final costs would depend on personnel needs as determined by the agency. There would be additional personnel costs related to administering any new grant programs, upon appropriation, in addition to the agency's existing suicide prevention grant programs, if new grant programs are created as authorized under HB 5276.

There would also be additional ongoing costs under HB 5277 if the MVAA chose to utilize the authorized electronic or mobile platform to connect eligible individuals with services and resources. Costs to contract with a vendor to provide these technology services is not yet known. There would also be likely additional costs under HB 5280 to contract with a public or private organization for the Transition Bridge program.

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.