

By Senator Wright

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A bill to be entitled

An act relating to veterans' assistance; creating s.
295.235, F.S.; requiring the Department of Veterans'
Affairs, subject to appropriation, to expand programs
connecting veterans and their families and survivors
to certain services, benefits, and support; requiring
the department to host public events for such purpose;
requiring the department to submit an annual report to
the Governor and Legislature; providing an effective
date.

WHEREAS, Florida offers its population of 1.4 million
veterans unique benefits, such as in-state tuition rates for
veterans and their families using the Post-9/11 GI Bill, several
layers of property tax exemptions, and expanded veterans'
preference, including extensive benefits and licensure and fee
waivers, for many activities and occupations, and

WHEREAS, veterans' benefits and services provided by the
State of Florida are meant to complement and augment available
federal programs to avoid duplication of effort and unnecessary
state expense for a federally funded service or benefit, and

WHEREAS, with only 749,000 Florida veterans enrolled in
earned health care services from the United States Department of
Veterans Affairs, hundreds of thousands of the state's veterans
and their families are not taking advantage of earned federal,
state, and local services, benefits, and support, and

WHEREAS, while Department of Veterans' Affairs veterans'
claims examiners assisted more than 245,000 veterans in
providing information and counsel on earned services, benefits,

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and support by the end of fiscal year 2024, additional federal dollars for Florida veterans remain untouched due to a lack of awareness, and

WHEREAS, a corresponding increase in the quality and quantity of outreach opportunities linking veterans with earned benefits through the Department of Veterans' Affairs will not only increase the quality of life for Florida veterans and their families, but provide additional federal dollars to bolster local economies, NOW, THEREFORE,

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 295.235, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

295.235 Funds for promoting veteran assistance.-

(1) Subject to an annual appropriation of \$500,000 by the Legislature, the Department of Veterans' Affairs shall enhance and expand its Internet-based, mobile application, printed, social media, and in-person outreach programs through various means for the purpose of connecting veterans, their families, and their survivors with earned services, benefits, and support beyond existing underfunded efforts.

(2) Using appropriated funds, the department must host at least two public events each year to disseminate information to in-person and virtual attendees regarding benefits and services available to veterans, including, but not limited to, educational, medical, insurance, and disability benefits.

(3) The department must submit an annual report to the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the

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House of Representatives which includes the number of public
events hosted by the department, the number of attendees at each
such event, and any other information deemed necessary by the
department.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2025.