

5881

2013-2014 Regular Sessions

I N   A S S E M B L Y

March 8, 2013

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Introduced by M. of A. ORTIZ -- read once and referred to the Committee  
on Veterans' Affairs

AN ACT to create a course of instruction to train mental health provid-  
ers in veteran specific mental health issues

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, REPRESENTED IN SENATE AND ASSEM-  
BLY, DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

1     Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as  
2     the "veterans mental health training initiative".  
3     S 2. Legislative intent. The legislature finds and declares that the  
4     state of New York and the country at large are facing a formidable chal-  
5     lenge in serving the mental health needs of veterans returning from  
6     active duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the beginning of Operation  
7     Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, over one and a half  
8     million active duty and reserve members of the United States military  
9     have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan, and nearly one-half million  
10    have been redeployed. With each deployment, our service members encount-  
11    er extreme strains on their physical and mental health, which, in many  
12    cases have resulted in unprecedented rates of health and mental health  
13    problems, most notably post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and trau-  
14    matic brain injury (TBI). Equally alarming, are numerous reports of  
15    increased suicide, addiction and homelessness among our returning  
16    soldiers. Further, family members are struggling with the ramifications  
17    of extended and/or multiple deployments, resulting in serious emotional  
18    and psychological tolls.  
19    In addition to high rates of PTSD, providers in the mental health  
20    community have also begun reporting increased cases of traumatic brain  
21    injury sustained in the Iraq and Afghanistan theatres of combat due in  
22    large part to the use of improvised explosive devices (IED). Equally  
23    disturbing is the rate at which TBI has been misdiagnosed as PTSD.  
24    Numerous reports have told the story of soldiers returning from Iraq and  
25    Afghanistan with brain trauma, but because there are no visible head

EXPLANATION--Matter in *ITALICS* (underscored) is new; matter in brackets  
[ ] is old law to be omitted.

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1 wounds, symptoms such as memory loss and confusion are often mistaken as  
2 indicators of PTSD.

3 Many returning service members, particularly National Guard and  
4 Reserves, are not accessing services from the federal veterans adminis-  
5 tration or through the department of defense tricare system upon return-  
6 ing home; but rather, through community-based organizations and agen-  
7 cies. Therefore, community-based providers are experiencing an influx of  
8 returning service members for whom they are not entirely prepared to  
9 provide treatment.

10 To assure that such care be provided by an adequately trained mental  
11 health workforce, the state shall, through an open grant process, engage  
12 associations of social workers to design and conduct, in collaboration  
13 with an association of psychiatrists and associations of physicians a  
14 multi-disciplinary educational and training program for mental health  
15 providers to assist such providers, within their lawful scope of prac-  
16 tice, to identify, diagnose, and put forward a course of treatment for  
17 combat related PTSD, TBI and other mental health issues, including  
18 substance abuse. This course shall also serve to educate service members  
19 and family members of service members in accessing mental health and  
20 related social services.

21 S 3. The office of mental health in consultation with the division of  
22 veterans' affairs shall:

23 a. through an open and competitive process award a grant of no less  
24 than \$500,000.00 for the purpose of developing and deploying an educa-  
25 tion and training program for health, mental health, and other human  
26 service providers. Such program will also provide training and education  
27 to veterans and family members of veterans on navigating mental health  
28 systems of care.

29 Such program will be designed to maximize the treatment and recovery  
30 from combat related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic  
31 brain injury (TBI) and other combat related mental health issues,  
32 including substance abuse. This grant shall be distributed in the  
33 amount of \$250,000.00 at the beginning of each state fiscal year, for  
34 two years, starting in 2014; however, a sum to be determined by the  
35 office of mental health may be forwarded for future years' expenditures  
36 if it is determined to be necessary for the proper implementation of the  
37 program;

38 b. require such association of social workers to implement the  
39 purposes of such grant in collaboration with an association of psychia-  
40 trists, an association of physicians and such other statewide associ-  
41 ations, as the office of mental health in consultation with the division  
42 of veterans' affairs shall deem appropriate; and

43 c. have the power to audit such association to ensure the proper  
44 expenditure of state funds.

45 S 4. The association receiving such grant pursuant to section three of  
46 this act shall:

47 a. develop and deploy an education and training program as prescribed  
48 in section three of this act. Such program shall be consistent with  
49 national and state guidelines regarding the diagnosis and treatment of  
50 PTSD, TBI and combat related mental health issues including substance  
51 abuse;

52 b. conduct such program in multiple locations across the state;

53 c. establish an advisory committee to include experts in the fields  
54 of neurology and psychiatry, to be recommended by the statewide associ-  
55 ation of physicians and the statewide association of psychiatrists. The  
56 advisory committee will also include experts in traumatology, PTSD, TBI,

1 military mental health, veterans' health and administration, and  
2 licensed social work practitioners with a demonstrated expertise in  
3 veterans mental health. The advisory committee shall also include a  
4 combat veteran and a family member of a combat veteran;

5 d. contract with an association of physicians and an association of  
6 psychiatrists to (1) advise and assist with the design and development  
7 of core content with respect to matters relating to the practice of  
8 medicine; and (2) provide physician experts in PTSD, TBI and other  
9 combat related psychiatric and neurological disorders for the program;

10 e. produce a yearly report to the legislature, the division of veter-  
11 ans' affairs, office of mental health and the office of alcoholism and  
12 substance abuse services regarding the progress, expenditures and effec-  
13 tiveness of the program;

14 f. conduct the program in direct consultation with the office of  
15 mental health and the division of veterans' affairs; and

16 g. provide a certified continuing education course on veteran specific  
17 mental health issues, to be made available online.

18 S 5. The office of alcoholism and substance abuse services shall:

19 a. consult with the office of mental health and the division of veter-  
20 ans' affairs and provide guidelines necessary for the proper design and  
21 implementation of this program; and

22 b. have the power to make recommendations to the office of mental  
23 health and the division of veterans' affairs and legislature as to the  
24 effectiveness and future need for such a program.

25 S 6. Nothing in this act shall be construed to affect the scope of  
26 practice of any profession licensed pursuant to the laws of this state  
27 or to authorize or compel any change therein.

28 S 7. This act shall take effect April 1, 2014.