



# THE PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GOVERNMENT

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

<b>BILL:</b>	<b>Senate Bill 324 – Veterans – Behavioral Health Services – Mental Health First Aid</b>
<b>SPONSOR:</b>	<b>Senators Simonaire, Carozza, Carter, Klausmeier, Patterson, Rosapepe, Salling, and Young</b>
<b>HEARING DATE:</b>	<b>February 4, 2020</b>
<b>COMMITTEE:</b>	<b>Finance</b>
<b>CONTACT:</b>	<b>Intergovernmental Affairs Office, 301-780-8411</b>
<b>POSITION:</b>	<b>SUPPORT</b>

The Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 324 – Veterans – Behavioral Health Services – Mental Health First Aid** which requires Mental Health First Aid training for veterans and their immediate family members on identifying and responding to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. This training would be included in the care coordination services provided by the Maryland Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration.

Maryland is home to 369,845 veterans; 54,789 (15%) of whom reside in Prince George's County.<sup>1</sup> Our veterans have significant mental health needs, particularly those who served in Afghanistan and Iraq during Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Fourteen percent of veterans of these missions have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), 14% have major depression, and 19% reported a probable Traumatic Brain Injury.<sup>2</sup> Veterans are also 50% more likely to commit suicide than non-veterans.<sup>3</sup>

However, only 53% of veterans experiencing PTSD or major depression sought help in the past year from a physician or mental health provider.<sup>4</sup>

Mental Health First Aid is an evidence-based international training program to increase knowledge about mental health and substance use disorders (SUD). Trained participants feel more confident in their ability to help someone and may improve

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census 2017 American Community Survey, Table S2101

<sup>2</sup> Jaycox, Lisa and Tanielian, Terri. *Invisible Wound of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery*, RAND Corporation, 2008, pg. xxi

<sup>3</sup> *VA National Suicide Data Report 2005-2016*, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Sept. 2018, pg. 5

<sup>4</sup> Jaycox, Lisa and Tanielian, Terri. pg. xxi

their own mental wellness. This impact is well-documented: participants learn to identify signs and symptoms of mental health and SUD, how to offer help to someone in distress, and where to find treatment or self-help resources.<sup>5</sup>

SB 324 would expand access to Mental Health First Aid for veterans and their families. This training would equip veterans and their loved ones with the skills necessary to manage the mental health impacts of serving our country. Awareness and education could help the 47% of veterans with diagnosable PTSD or major depression who have not sought treatment to reach out for help.<sup>6</sup>

For the reasons stated above, the Office of the Prince George's County Executive **SUPPORTS Senate Bill 324** and asks for a **FAVORABLE** report.

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<sup>5</sup> "Research and Evidence Base," *Mental Health First Aid*, viewed on Feb. 4, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Jaycox, Lisa and Tanielian, Terri. pg. xxiii