

Department of Legislative Services
 Maryland General Assembly
 2017 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
 First Reader

House Bill 274 (Delegate Queen, *et al.*)
 Health and Government Operations

Veterans - Availability and Accessibility of Health Care Services and
 Transportation - Study

This bill requires the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), in cooperation with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), to conduct a study on the availability and accessibility of health care services to meet the needs of veterans in the State as well as the availability and accessibility of transportation to the health care services. DHMH is required to report to specified committees of the General Assembly by January 1, 2018.

The bill takes effect July 1, 2017.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by up to \$175,000 in FY 2018 only, for DHMH to contract with an outside organization to conduct the study required under the bill, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

| (in dollars) | FY 2018 | FY 2019 | FY 2020 | FY 2021 | FY 2022 |
|----------------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Revenues | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| GF Expenditure | 175,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Net Effect | (\$175,000) | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 | \$0 |

Note:() = decrease; GF = general funds; FF = federal funds; SF = special funds; - = indeterminate increase; (-) = indeterminate decrease

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: The study is required to (1) include the availability and accessibility of health care services and transportation through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, State, and local government programs or privately supported or volunteer programs; (2) identify gaps in the availability and accessibility of health care services and transportation to health care services; and (3) identify options, including the use of federal and other funds that may be available but are not being used, for filling the identified gaps. The study must include a particular focus on the behavioral health care needs of veterans in the State.

Current Law/Background: Maryland's Commitment to Veterans (MCV) is a DHMH program devoted to total wellness for veterans and their families. Regional resource coordinators provide assistance to veterans and their families to support a healthy transition to civilian life. With support from DHMH's Behavioral Health Administration, MCV provides a connection to wellness services, with an emphasis on mental health and substance use disorder services.

MCV also has dedicated funds to provide for the coordination and facilitation of transportation for veterans to and from behavioral health appointments. Coordinators are available to answer questions, address concerns, or help with obstacles veterans and their families might face. In 2016, MCV responded to 1,334 calls received through its help line from veterans, the families of veterans, community providers, VA Maryland Health Care, and civic organizations.

MDVA was created in 1999 as an executive agency with the mission of assisting veterans, active-duty service members, and their families and dependents in securing benefits earned through military service. MDVA provides a wide array of services, including assistance with connecting veterans with a variety of State and federal programs to address a range of health care issues, including behavioral health.

Chapter 555 of 2008, the Maryland Veterans Behavioral Health Act, among other things, required specified State and federal entities to conduct an analysis of behavioral health needs of Maryland veterans. [The report](#), published in 2011, includes analyses of gaps in behavioral health services, health care coverage and access, transportation, and coordination and communication.

State Expenditures: DHMH advises that MCV would be responsible for conducting the study required under the bill. However, MCV advises that the study cannot be conducted by existing staff; instead, it recommends contracting with an outside entity to conduct the study. Likewise, according to MDVA, due to an increased workload, additional assignments cannot be absorbed with existing resources. As a result, the study needs to be

conducted by an outside entity or with the assistance of contractual staff with expertise in the issues to be addressed.

Accordingly, general fund expenditures increase by up to \$175,000 in fiscal 2018 only for DHMH, in cooperation with MDVA, to contract with an outside organization to conduct the study required under the bill. This estimate is based on an inquiry made by MDVA, following the release of a 2013 needs assessment by a nonprofit health systems research and consulting organization for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, for a similar analysis from the same organization. If contractual staff were used instead, costs would be comparable.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Health and Mental Hygiene; Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 7, 2017
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