

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader - Revised

Senate Bill 66

(Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Finance

Health and Government Operations

**Health – Vital Statistics – Veteran and Armed Services Member Suicide
Reporting**

This bill requires the Secretary of Health to publish an annual report on the suicides of veterans and members currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. The report may include only specified demographic information, the nature of service, and the method of suicide. The report must include aggregate information for the previous five years or the total number of years for which information is available, whichever is less. The report must be submitted to the State Department of Veterans Affairs and specified committees of the General Assembly by December 1 each year. **The bill terminates December 31, 2021.**

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's requirements can likely be absorbed within existing budgeted resources, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A certificate of death must be filled out and signed by either the medical examiner (if the medical examiner takes charge of the body) or the physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner who last attended the deceased. These individuals may fill in only the following information on the certificate of death: (1) the decedent's name; (2) the cause of death and medical certification; (3) the date and hour of death; and (4) the place of death.

Each individual who is charged with completing a certificate of death must promptly notify the medical examiner if the individual considers certain conditions to be the cause of death or to have contributed to the death, including suicide.

The Secretary of Health must annually publish a vital statistics report, including population estimates, and must also report specific deaths to the Morbidity, Mortality, and Quality Review Committee (such as deaths of individuals with developmental disabilities or mental illnesses who were receiving specified State services).

Background: According to the Maryland Department of Health's Vital Statistics Administration (VSA), certificates of death in Maryland have included an indicator as to whether the decedent was ever in the U.S. Armed Forces since January 1, 2015. This information is currently completed by the funeral facility based on information provided to them (usually by a relative).

In August 2016, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a report entitled *Suicide Among Veterans and Other Americans (2001–2014)*. The report was the largest analysis of veteran suicide rates in the United States to date. The report found that nationally in 2014:

- an average of 20 veterans died by suicide each day;
- veterans constituted 8.5% of the U.S. adult population (ages 18 and older), yet accounted for 18% of all deaths by suicide among U.S. adults;
- about 67% of all veteran deaths by suicide were caused by firearms;
- about 65% of all veterans who died by suicide were ages 50 and older;
- after adjusting for differences in age and sex, the risk for suicide was 22% higher among veterans compared with U.S. civilian adults;
- after adjusting for differences in age, the risk for suicide was 19% higher among male veterans compared with U.S. civilian adult men;
- after adjusting for differences in age, the risk for suicide was 2.5 times higher among female veterans compared with U.S. civilian adult women; and
- rates of suicide were highest among younger veterans (ages 18 to 29) and lowest among older veterans (ages 60 and older).

VA also reported state-specific information. According to VA, for Maryland in 2014:

- there were a total of 89 veteran suicides, resulting in a veteran suicide rate of 23.1 per 100,000 (compared to the national veteran suicide rate of 38.4 per 100,000 and a rate of 12.8 per 100,000 for the overall Maryland population);

- about 35% of veteran suicides were by adults ages 55 to 74; and
- about 70% of veteran suicides were caused by firearms.

State Expenditures: The bill requires the Secretary of Health to publish an annual report on the suicides of veterans and members currently serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. As VSA already publishes reports with a variety of health statistics, the Department of Legislative Services (DLS) advises that VSA can likely absorb this requirement within existing budgeted resources, although staff may need to be temporarily diverted from other tasks in order to compile and complete the report. DLS notes that the bill takes effect October 1, 2018; thus, the first report must be submitted by December 1, 2018. To the extent additional staff time and resources are necessary to meet the first report's compressed deadline, general fund expenditures may increase minimally.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: HB 1159 (Delegate P. Young, *et al.*) - Health and Government Operations.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Health; Department of Veterans Affairs; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Department of Legislative Services

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