

1 AN ACT relating to veterans.

2 ***Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:***

3 ➔Section 1. KRS 154.12-330 is amended to read as follows:

4 (1) The Kentucky Economic Development Finance Authority is hereby authorized to
5 develop and fund a small business loan program to assist new or existing small
6 businesses operating in the Commonwealth. The authority may lend up to one
7 hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) to any eligible small business for acquisition,
8 construction, expansion, working capital, or any other business expense the
9 authority deems reasonable to approve.

10 (2) The authority shall determine the terms, conditions, and requirements for loans
11 issued under this section, including collateral requirements when deemed
12 reasonable and appropriate. Recognizing that small businesses, while essential for
13 the economic vitality of the Commonwealth, may have difficulty obtaining
14 conventional loans, the authority may provide terms that are more lenient, high-risk,
15 less secure, or otherwise less stringent than industry standards.

16 (3) To be eligible for a loan under this section, a small business shall be engaged in
17 manufacturing, agribusiness, or service or technology, shall not be engaged
18 primarily in retail, and shall commit to creating and maintaining at least one (1)
19 new full-time job above the number existing on the date of application.

20 **(4) The authority shall develop criteria to evaluate loan applications that give**
21 **investment preference to businesses that:**

22 **(a) Employ veterans at a rate of no less than twenty-five percent (25%) of the**
23 **business's total number of employees; or**

24 **(b) Are veteran-owned businesses, as defined in KRS 14A.1-070.**

25 **The authority shall use these criteria to make all reasonable efforts to direct at**
26 **least seven percent (7%) of loaned funds each year to these businesses, provided**
27 **that the authority receives qualified applications from these businesses that**

1 request at least seven percent (7%) of the total funds budgeted to be loaned each
2 year.

3 ➔SECTION 2. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 151B IS CREATED TO
4 READ AS FOLLOWS:

5 (1) The Office of the Kentucky Center for Statistics shall produce a monthly
6 electronic report that shall:

7 (a) Include workforce need projections which are organized by industry, major
8 occupational group, geographic region, and necessary credentials or
9 training;

10 (b) Compare those workforce need projections with existing and projected
11 workforce availability as well as the availability of necessary credentials in
12 the Commonwealth;

13 (c) Highlight in-demand industries, occupational groups, and credentials by
14 geographic region; and

15 (d) Include a list of which in-demand jobs and credentials would leverage the
16 skills, experience, and credentials possessed by veterans.

17 (2) The office shall, at least once per month, forward this report, underlying data,
18 and any additional relevant information to:

19 (a) The Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs;

20 (b) Military out-placement offices;

21 (c) Vocational education centers; and

22 (d) Nonprofit programs which connect veterans to jobs.

23 ➔SECTION 3. A NEW SECTION OF SUBCHAPTER 12 OF KRS CHAPTER
24 154 IS CREATED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

25 (1) The Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs shall annually review
26 apprenticeship, training, and other in-state vocational programs focused on
27 providing job training and placement to returning veterans. This annual review

1 shall compare the costs and outcomes of the reviewed programs.

2 (2) The commission shall use the results of the annual review to develop a series of
3 recommendations on how to utilize state funding to expand those programs which
4 receive the most favorable evaluations. The commission shall include an
5 estimation of the future returns and improved outcomes from proposed program
6 expansions to the Commonwealth.

7 (3) The commission shall provide an annual report describing its recommendations
8 from subsection (2) of this section to the Legislative Research Commission for
9 referral to the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public
10 Protection, the Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and
11 Administrative Regulations, and the Interim Joint Committee on Economic
12 Development and Workforce Investment, and to the Office of the Governor to
13 assist those entities in making annual budget decisions prior to November 1 of
14 each year for five (5) years after the effective date of this Act.

15 ➔SECTION 4. A NEW SECTION OF SUBCHAPTER 12 OF KRS CHAPTER
16 154 IS CREATED TO READ AS FOLLOWS:

17 (1) The Kentucky Commission on Military Affairs is directed to review all state
18 occupational licenses for which military members may have relevant training or
19 experience and to produce a report recommending steps that can be taken to
20 increase the recognition of military training and experience towards in-state
21 licensing within one (1) year from the effective date of this Act.

22 (2) The commission shall thereafter:

23 (a) Take any steps identified in the report that can be taken without further
24 legislation as soon as practicable and not later than one (1) year after
25 issuance of the report; and

26 (b) Report to the Legislative Research Commission for referral to the Interim
27 Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative

1 Regulations and the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs,
2 and Public Protection annually to request that those entities consider any
3 necessary legislation.

4 ➔SECTION 5. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 311 IS CREATED TO
5 READ AS FOLLOWS:

6 (1) The Kentucky Board of Medical Licensure shall review all licensing practices
7 and take all necessary and appropriate steps to increase recognition of military
8 training and experience toward in-state licensing of nurses and physician
9 assistants through the promulgation of administrative regulations.

10 (2) The board shall report to the Legislative Research Commission for referral to the
11 Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection,
12 and the Interim Joint Committee on Licensing, Occupations, and Administrative
13 Regulations within one (1) year of the effective date of this Act any additional
14 steps that would require legislation and request that those entities consider any
15 necessary legislation.

16 ➔SECTION 6. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 164 IS CREATED TO
17 READ AS FOLLOWS:

18 (1) Any veteran who enrolls as a student in good standing at a public postsecondary
19 education institution shall, upon application for academic credit, be granted
20 academic credit towards his or her degree for the completion of courses that were
21 part of that veteran's military training or service if the completed courses meet
22 the standards of all appropriate discipline-specific accrediting bodies and
23 institutional accrediting agencies as recognized by the United States Department
24 of Education.

25 (2) No fee, tuition, or other charge shall be assessed against a veteran for academic
26 credit granted pursuant to this section.

27 (3) The governing boards of all public postsecondary education institutions shall

1 adopt procedures necessary to fully implement the provisions of this section.

2 ➔SECTION 7. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 164 IS CREATED TO
3 READ AS FOLLOWS:

4 The governing boards of all public institutions shall adopt rules and procedures to:

5 (1) Include veterans and National Guard members in any early course registration
6 period, if the institution offers an early course registration period to any segment
7 of the student population;

8 (2) Award full academic credit to a student who is called to active duty in the United
9 States military for a course if at the time the student is called to active duty:

10 (a) The student has completed at least eighty-five (85%) of the coursework
11 contributing to the final grade in the course, including but not limited to
12 exams and classroom attendance, if applicable; and

13 (b) Has a passing grade;

14 (3) Refund a portion of tuition and fees to a student who is called to active duty and
15 does not meet the requirements of subsection (2) of this section for academic
16 credit to be awarded, that portion being determined by taking the total amount of
17 tuition and fees paid by the student for the current academic term and
18 multiplying that total amount by the percentage of academic credits for which the
19 student is enrolled in the current term for which the student is not eligible to
20 receive academic credit under subsection (2) of this section;

21 (4) Permit all veterans and any National Guard member who is returning from active
22 duty to do the following without incurring late fees or other penalties:

23 (a) File an application for admission at any time prior to the first day of classes
24 of the semester for which the applicant is seeking admission;

25 (b) Once an application has been filled but before the institution has issued a
26 determination on admission, register for available courses and permit the
27 applicant to attend courses provisionally; and

1 (c) If an applicant is not registered for classes upon admission to the
2 institution, register for available courses prior to the registration deadline.

3 ➔Section 8. KRS 40.317 is amended to read as follows:

4 (1) The Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs shall employ ~~no more than five (5)~~
5 ~~}veterans' benefits regional administrators and {no fewer than twenty (20)}~~veterans'
6 benefits field representatives.

7 (a)~~(1)~~ The duties of a veterans' benefits regional administrator shall include but
8 not be limited to supervision of veterans' benefits field representatives in an
9 assigned region.

10 (b)~~(2)~~ The duties of a veterans' benefits field representative shall include but
11 not be limited to providing assistance to veterans and their dependents with
12 initiation, preparation, documentation, and adjudication of claims to benefits
13 under federal, state, or local laws.

14 (2) The department shall, whenever feasible, select and train veterans' benefits field
15 representatives and veterans' benefits regional administrators who have direct
16 knowledge of the veteran communities they serve.

17 (3) Veterans' benefits field representatives shall help identify all federal and other
18 health benefits, coverage, and services available to veterans and their families.

19 (4) Veterans' benefits field representatives shall coordinate with relevant
20 departments, health care providers, and health insurance programs to help
21 veterans and their beneficiaries apply for coverage under such programs,
22 including helping veterans overcome barriers within the health care system to
23 ensure enrollment in health plans and effective delivery and coordination of
24 health services.

25 (5) Initiatives by veterans' benefits field representatives shall, whenever feasible,
26 leverage existing resources and structures where veterans and their families are
27 likely to be found.

1 ➔ SECTION 9. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 40 IS CREATED TO
2 READ AS FOLLOWS:

3 (1) The Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs shall examine all existing
4 programs designed to increase access to affordable quality health care by using
5 the veterans' benefits field representatives described in Section 8 of this Act as a
6 source of information about the unique needs and coverage and treatment gaps
7 faced by veterans and their families in order to evaluate if the needs of veterans
8 and their families are met by those programs or whether further coordination
9 with the veterans' benefits field representatives or other programs or initiatives
10 would better meet those needs.

11 (2) The department shall, upon completing any steps identified in subsection (1) of
12 this section, produce a report of its findings, recommendations, and any
13 additional legislative or budgetary action it recommends and deliver the report to
14 the Legislative Research Commission for referral to the Interim Joint Committee
15 on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public Protection, the Interim Joint Committee
16 on Health Services, and the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children,
17 and to the Office of the Governor, and shall make the report freely available to
18 the public.

19 (3) The department shall prepare a report showing the impacts that Medicaid
20 expansion under 42 U.S.C. § 1396a and other relevant federal law has had to
21 date for veterans and their families in Kentucky. The report shall include any
22 recommendations for better including or serving veterans and their families in
23 that expansion. The department shall deliver that report to the Legislative
24 Research Commission for referral to the Interim Joint Committee on Veterans,
25 Military Affairs, and Public Protection, the Interim Joint Committee on Families
26 and Children, and the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services, and to the
27 Office of the Governor, and shall make the report freely available to the public.

1 ➔ SECTION 10. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 40 IS CREATED TO
2 READ AS FOLLOWS:

3 (1) The Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs shall ensure that veterans and
4 their families have access to mental health treatment, including for post-
5 traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, and suicidal ideation.

6 (a) The department shall make mental health coverage services and treatment a
7 full focus stream of the veterans' benefits field representative program
8 described in Section 8 of this Act, and ensure that veterans' benefit field
9 representatives help identify all federal and other mental health benefits,
10 coverage, and services available to veterans and their families, including for
11 post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicide prevention.

12 (b) The department shall develop and implement a strategy to reduce barriers to
13 access to mental health services and treatment for veterans and their
14 families in coordination with local, state, and federal governmental
15 agencies and in consultation with nonprofits, service providers including
16 Veterans Affairs medical centers and the United States Department of
17 Veterans Affairs, and localities and cities that have effective prevention and
18 treatment systems for mental health, including by:

19 1. Identifying structural and logistical barriers to accessing treatment,
20 including perceived stigma, long travel distances to receive care, and
21 any other barriers, and sending an annual report on such barriers
22 available to the Legislative Research Commission for referral to the
23 Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public
24 Protection, the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children,
25 and the Interim Joint Committee on Health, and to the Office of the
26 Governor, and making the report available online;

27 2. Resolving all barriers identified in the report in subparagraph 1. of

1 this paragraph that can be resolved without legislative or budgetary
2 action, including through increased coordination between
3 departments, nonprofit providers, and the federal government,
4 application for and use of private and federal grants, and other
5 actions; and

6 3. Reporting annually to the Legislative Research Commission, the
7 Interim Joint Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, and Public
8 Protection, the Interim Joint Committee on Families and Children,
9 and the Interim Joint Committee on Health Services, and to the Office
10 of the Governor, and releasing to the news media any additional
11 legislative or budgetary steps that would resolve barriers identified in
12 subparagraph 1. of this paragraph that have not been resolved by the
13 steps taken under subparagraph 2. of this paragraph.

14 (c) The department shall enhance and strengthen suicide prevention programs
15 that are based on best practices identified by experts in the field of mental
16 health care in coordination with local, state, and federal government
17 agencies, and in consultation with nonprofits, service providers including
18 the Veterans Affairs medical centers and the United States Department of
19 Veterans Affairs, and localities and cities that have effective prevention and
20 treatment systems for mental health, including by:

21 1. Identifying and applying for federal and private grants focused on
22 veteran suicide prevention;

23 2. Coordinating local, state, federal, and nonprofit programs that include
24 community-based approaches for at-risk veterans and veterans at
25 large;

26 3. Providing technical assistance to communities to develop strategic
27 plans to reduce veteran suicide, including through coordination and

1 participation by local leaders, faith communities, schools, workplaces,
2 and other stakeholders; and

3 4. Evaluating community strategic plans within Kentucky and
4 disseminating learnings and best practices to optimize the impact of
5 efforts by all partners and stakeholders.

6 (2) The department shall ensure that resources are available to veterans to assist in
7 connecting veterans to trained mental health care providers, including those
8 trained in veteran suicide prevention.

9 (a) The department shall create a centralized provider database, organized by
10 region, identifying mental health providers with expertise and ability to
11 assist veterans and their families which also identifies which mental health
12 providers have training or expertise in the prevention of veteran suicide and
13 treatment of veteran suicidal ideation.

14 (b) The department shall use existing resources and incorporate best practice
15 and research from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and
16 state and nonprofit service providers in Kentucky to develop a continuing
17 education course for mental health providers in Kentucky to obtain
18 expertise in veteran suicide assessment, prevention, treatment, and risk
19 management.

20 (c) The department shall make the veteran suicide continuing education course
21 described in paragraph (b) of this subsection available for free to providers
22 in regions of the Commonwealth identified in paragraph (a) of this
23 subsection which lack a sufficient number of trained providers.

24 (d) The department shall use existing or appropriated resources to identify
25 evidence-based best practices to increase awareness of any veteran suicide
26 prevention hotline which provides services in-state and other crisis
27 resources with proven effectiveness to reduce veteran suicide.

1 ➔ SECTION 11. A NEW SECTION OF KRS CHAPTER 40 IS CREATED TO
2 READ AS FOLLOWS:

3 The Kentucky Department of Veterans' Affairs shall create an initiative designed to
4 end veteran homelessness.

5 (1) As used in this section, "ending veteran homelessness" has the same meaning as
6 in the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness Criteria and
7 Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness.

8 (2) The department shall develop and implement a strategy to meet the goal of ending
9 veteran homelessness within three (3) years of the effective date of this Act in
10 coordination with local, state, and federal government agencies and nonprofits,
11 and in consultation with states and cities that have achieved an end to veteran
12 homelessness in accordance with the criteria described in subsection (1) of this
13 section, including through:

14 (a) Coordinated community outreach and a common assessment tool;

15 (b) A community-wide, comprehensive list of veterans experiencing
16 homelessness, prioritized based on vulnerability;

17 (c) Data-sharing among all relevant providers, government agencies, and
18 Veterans Affairs Medical Centers;

19 (d) Increased coordination and streamlined processes for appropriate housing
20 placements;

21 (e) Connecting veterans experiencing homelessness to health, mental health,
22 employment, and training resources through the services described in this
23 section;

24 (f) A commitment to Housing First principles, as defined by the United States
25 Interagency Council on Homelessness; and

26 (g) Identification of and application for funding as needed from privation,
27 foundation, and other partners.