

CHAPTER 116

AN ACT concerning a veteran peer support telephone helpline, and supplementing chapter 13 of Title 38A of the New Jersey Statutes.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

C.38A:13-10 Findings, declarations relative to a veteran peer support telephone helpline.

1. a. The Legislature finds and declares that the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, in conjunction with the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, has established a veteran to veteran peer support program telephone helpline. The helpline receives and responds to calls from veterans, servicemembers, and their families. It provides them with access to a comprehensive mental health provider network of mental health professionals specializing in post traumatic stress disorder and other veterans issues. All services are free and confidential.

b. Since its inception, the helpline has fielded over 6,000 calls from veterans and their families and based on prior statistics, a 10% increase in calls has been projected.

c. The helpline is funded through an allocation from a State appropriation for post traumatic stress disorder. It is appropriate that the helpline have a separate annual appropriation.

C.38A:13-11 Establishment of helpline.

2. a. The Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs shall establish, in coordination with University Behavioral HealthCare of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, a toll free veteran to veteran peer support helpline.

b. The helpline shall be accessible 24 hours a day seven days per week and shall respond to calls from veterans, servicemembers and their families. The operators of the helpline shall seek to identify the veterans, servicemembers and their families who should be referred to further peer support and counseling services, and provide referrals.

c. The operators of the helpline shall be trained by University Behavioral Healthcare of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and, to the greatest extent possible, shall be trained veterans or mental health professionals with military service expertise and (1) familiar with post traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury and the emotional and psychological tensions, depressions, and anxieties unique to veterans, servicemembers, and their families or (2) trained to provide counseling services involving marriage and family life, substance abuse, personal stress management and other emotional or psychological disorders or conditions which may be likely to adversely affect the personal and service related well-being of veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

d. The Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey shall provide for the confidentiality of the names of the persons calling, the information discussed, and any referrals for further peer support or counseling; provided, however, the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey may establish guidelines providing for the tracking of any person who exhibits a severe emotional or psychological disorder or condition which the operator handling the call reasonably believes might result in harm to the veteran or servicemember or any other person.

C.38A:13-12 List of credentialed health care providers.

3. University Behavioral Healthcare of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey shall maintain a list of credentialed military-oriented behavioral healthcare providers

throughout the State of New Jersey. Case management services shall also be provided to ensure that veterans, servicemembers, and their families receive ongoing counseling throughout all pre and post deployment events in New Jersey. The continuum of services shall utilize the National Yellow Ribbon guidelines while providing ongoing peer support customized for each branch of military service.

C.38A:13-13 Quarterly consultations.

4. In establishing the helpline authorized under the provisions of section 2 of this act, P.L.2011, c.116 (C.38A:13-11) the Adjutant General of the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs and University Behavioral Healthcare of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey shall consult on a quarterly basis with the New Jersey Division of Mental Health Services within the Department of Human Services, the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs, the New Jersey Veterans Healthcare Network, at least two New Jersey Veteran Centers, and at least two State recognized veteran groups.

5. There shall be appropriated annually from the General Fund to the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs a sum sufficient for the operation of the program.

6. This act shall take effect on the first day of the fourth month following enactment, but the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey may take such anticipatory administrative action in advance thereof as shall be necessary for the implementation of this act.

Approved August 19, 2011.