

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
First Reader

Senate Bill 66
Finance

(Senator Simonaire, *et al.*)

Health - Vital Statistics - Veteran Suicide Reporting

This bill requires a medical examiner, physician, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner to include on a decedent's certificate of death information as to whether the decedent was ever a member of the U.S. Armed Forces, if known. Additionally, the Secretary of Health must publish an annual report on veteran suicide, which may include only specified demographic information and the method of suicide. The report must be submitted to the State Department of Veterans Affairs and specified committees of the General Assembly by December 1, 2019, and annually thereafter.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: General fund expenditures increase by \$8,200 in FY 2019 only. 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: 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: 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. However, this information is currently completed by the funeral facility based on information

provided to them (usually by a relative). VSA advises that in order to allow a medical certifier to record this information, VSA's electronic death registration system must be modified. Thus, general fund expenditures increase by \$8,155 in fiscal 2019 only for VSA to make one-time programming changes.

The bill also requires the Secretary of Health to publish an annual report on veteran suicides. As VSA already publishes reports with a variety of health statistics, the Department of Legislative Services 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.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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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