

SENATE MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2383

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 19, 2022

The Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 2383.

This bill requires the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMVA) to assist former service members of the Armed Forces who were separated from the service with an other than honorable discharge, bad conduct discharge, or a dishonorable discharge who have since been diagnosed with a service-connected mental health condition. The DMVA would assist these former service members with the appropriate and necessary forms and conditions to petition the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to have the designation of the discharge changed and recorded as honorable.

Under current law, the DMVA creates, publishes, and distributes material to all public agencies of the availability of assistance, and utilizes a uniform process to provide the assistance to former service members who were separated from the service with a general or other than honorable discharge due solely to their sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression. This bill expands this assistance to include former service members diagnosed with service-connected mental health conditions.

Former service members who have the designation of their discharge changed will be eligible for the same rights, privileges, and benefits currently offered to service members who were honorably discharged. No fee will be charged to a former service member for seeking assistance, and information related to the change in the designation of a discharge will be confidential and not accessible to the public as a government record.

This bill defines "service-connected mental health condition" as a condition defined to be consistent with generally recognized independent standards of current medical practice referenced in the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders that has been diagnosed by a licensed mental health professional, in which the mental health professional deems the condition to be connected, in whole or in part, with a service member's service in the Armed Forces of the United States.