



OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

February 4, 2020

The Honorable Thomas Stevens
Chair
House General, Housing and Military Affairs Committee
115 State Street, Room 44
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-5301

RE: H.769 – An act relating to veteran status inquiries on program and service intake forms.

Chairman Stevens and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of military families and the Department of Defense, I am writing to express support for the policy changes proposed in H.769, a bill that proposes to require that intake forms used by the Departments for Children and Families; of Vermont Health Access; and of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living seek information as to whether an applicant or family member has ever served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

My name is Harold Cooney and I am the Northeast Regional Liaison for the Defense-State Liaison Office, operating under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy. Our mission is to be a resource to state policymakers as they work to address quality of life issues of military families.

This 2020 Department of Defense Quality of Life issue entitled ‘Ask the Question,’ is designed to assist service providers in identifying veterans in order to provide better care. In various surveys, veterans indicated one of the top barriers to receiving care was that they “do not feel understood by the providers who serve them.” Opportunities to help veterans and their families are often lost simply because the connection is not made.

Of the 19.9 million veterans in the United States, only 30 percent use VA healthcare services; 70 percent of veterans utilize community settings for health and behavioral healthcare, or go without such care. However, many community (non-VHA) behavioral health providers are unaware of the number of veterans they are serving and the resources available to them. According to the “Ready to Serve” study conducted by RAND (2014), only 8 percent of community providers reported high military cultural competency.

For various reasons, a veteran may not readily self-identify either for fear of stigma or simply because no one asked. Service providers in various state agencies can have a profound impact on these heroes and their care by connecting them to services and care through asking the simple question: “Have you or a family member ever served in the military?”

By asking this question, the provider may ask additional questions to determine the cause of various symptoms to better diagnosis the issue presented. Connecting them to the appropriate state Veterans Services agencies may provide access to federal funding and support services to provide that care rather than using scarce state funding. Could Vermont’s 40K+ veterans be better served?

Currently 4 states have incorporated language and 4 states have introduced bills with policy language to address this issue. We ask that Vermont consider this helpful policy language change, as well.

In closing, we are grateful for the tremendous efforts that Vermont has historically made to support our veterans, military members and their families. We appreciate the opportunity to support the policy reflected in H.769 and are especially grateful to Representative Grad for introducing this important piece of legislation. Thank you for taking the time to consider this issue. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Harold E. Cooney
Northeast Regional Liaison
Defense-State Liaison Office
Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
(Military Community and Family Policy)

CC: Representative Maxine Grad