

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Government Operations to which was referred Senate
3 Bill No. 111 entitled “An act relating to the U.S. Department of Veterans
4 Affairs’ Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry” respectfully reports
5 that it has considered the same and recommends that the bill be amended by
6 striking out all after the enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the
7 following:

8 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

9 The General Assembly finds that:

10 (1) According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), “burn
11 pits were a common way to get rid of waste at military sites in Iraq and
12 Afghanistan.”

13 (2) At present, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provides
14 contradictory information about the health impacts on soldiers of exposure to
15 burn pits.

16 (3) On the one hand, the Department’s website says, “At this time,
17 research does not show evidence of long-term health problems from exposure
18 to burn pits. VA continues to study the health of deployed Veterans.”

19 (4) On the other hand, under the heading “Health effects from burn pit
20 smoke” the VA states that “Toxins in burn pit smoke may affect the skin, eyes,
21 respiratory and cardiovascular systems, gastrointestinal tract and internal

1 organs. Veterans who were closer to burn pit smoke or exposed for longer
2 periods may be at greater risk. Health effects depend on a number of other
3 factors, such as the kind of waste being burned and wind direction. Most of
4 the irritation is temporary and resolves once the exposure is gone. This
5 includes eye irritation and burning, coughing and throat irritation, breathing
6 difficulties, and skin itching and rashes. The high level of fine dust and
7 pollution common in Iraq and Afghanistan may pose a greater danger for
8 respiratory illnesses than exposure to burn pits, according to a 2011 Institute of
9 Medicine report.”

10 (5) According to the VA, the waste products in burn pits include
11 “chemicals, paint, medical and human waste, metal/aluminum cans, munitions
12 and other unexploded ordnance, petroleum and lubricant products, plastics,
13 rubber, wood, and discarded food.”

14 (6) In the past, the U.S. Armed Forces have been slow to acknowledge
15 the physical injuries associated with environmental exposure during service
16 members’ active duty. Notable examples of this include exposure to Agent
17 Orange during the Vietnam War and the condition known as Gulf War
18 Veterans’ Medically Unexplained Illness.

19 (7) After a period of equivocation, the U.S. government has usually
20 acknowledged what veterans know too well—that their illnesses and suffering

1 are real, that it is connected to their military service, and that the U.S.
2 government must treat and compensate the veterans.

3 (8) Exposure to burn pits should be addressed proactively, and the State
4 of Vermont and the U.S. government should prioritize the health of service
5 members and veterans and not repeat past patterns of denial.

6 (9) A registry called the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry
7 has been created to track service members who may have been exposed to burn
8 pits. Between June 2014 and December 2018, 394 Vermonters joined the
9 Registry.

10 (10) It is important that every Vermonter who was or may have been
11 exposed to burn pits should participate in the Registry.

12 Sec. 2. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH; EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

13 (a)(1) On or before July 1, 2019, the Commissioner of Health, in
14 consultation with the Adjutant and Inspector General and the U.S. Department
15 of Veterans Affairs, shall develop written educational materials that provide
16 information about health effects that are associated with chemicals identified at
17 open burn pits during overseas military deployments, including:

18 (A) information regarding how to participate in the U.S. Department
19 of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry and
20 resources that can provide assistance with the registration process;

1 (B) information regarding the eligibility requirements for
2 participation in the Registry, including deployment locations and dates;

3 (C) contact information for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’
4 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry; and

5 (D) contact information for the Vermont Environmental Health
6 Coordinator at the White River Junction VA facility.

7 (2)(A) On or before July 1, 2019, the information shall be made
8 available on the Department of Health and the Office of Veterans Affairs
9 websites.

10 (B) The Department of Health, in cooperation with appropriate
11 professional licensing boards and professional membership associations, shall
12 ensure the information is made available to all licensed health care providers in
13 Vermont on or before July 1, 2019.

14 (b) On or before July 1, 2019, the Commissioner of Health and the
15 Adjutant and Inspector General, in coordination with any available and
16 interested federal or State agency, shall develop a pamphlet or other written
17 informational material regarding the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’
18 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry, including:

19 (1) information regarding the eligibility requirements for participation in
20 the Registry, including deployment locations and dates;

1 (2) information regarding how to participate in the Registry and
2 resources that can provide assistance with the registration process;

3 (3) the symptoms associated with exposure to open burn pits during
4 overseas military deployments;

5 (4) contact information for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’
6 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry; and

7 (5) contact information for the Vermont Environmental Health
8 Coordinator at the White River Junction VA facility.

9 Sec. 3. COMMUNICATION TO SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS;

10 NATIONAL GUARD; OFFICE OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

11 (a) Beginning on or before July 1, 2019, the Adjutant and Inspector
12 General and the Executive Director of the Vermont Office of Veterans Affairs,
13 in consultation with any available and interested federal or State agency, shall
14 collaborate to contact all members of the Vermont National Guard and all
15 known veterans and members of the U.S. Armed Forces residing in Vermont
16 who may be eligible to participate in the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs’
17 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry. In particular, the Adjutant and
18 Inspector General and the Executive Director of the Vermont Office of
19 Veterans Affairs shall contact all members of the Vermont National Guard and
20 any veteran or member of the U.S. Armed Forces residing in Vermont who
21 may have served in any of the following:

1 (1) Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or
2 Operation New Dawn;

3 (2) Djibouti, Africa, on or after September 11, 2001;

4 (3) Afghanistan, on or after September 11, 2001;

5 (4) Operation Desert Shield or Operation Desert Storm; or

6 (5) in the Southwest Asia theater of operations on or after August 2,
7 1990.

8 (b) Each veteran or service member contacted shall be encouraged to join
9 the Registry and shall be provided with:

10 (1) contact information for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs’
11 Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry; and

12 (2) a copy of the pamphlet created by the Commissioner of Health and
13 the Adjutant and Inspector General pursuant to Sec. 2 of this Act.

14 Sec. 4. ADJUTANT AND INSPECTOR GENERAL; COORDINATION
15 WITH U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

16 (a) On or before July 1, 2019, the Adjutant and Inspector General shall
17 encourage the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to enhance and simplify
18 the registration process for the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry
19 by providing for:

1 (1) identification verification for DS Logon Level 2 access to be made
2 available at U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' community-based outpatient
3 clinics throughout Vermont;

4 (2) the creation of a paper registration option; and

5 (3) the creation of a process for deceased veteran's family members to
6 participate in the Registry on behalf of a deceased veteran.

7 (b)(1) On or before July 1, 2019, the Adjutant and Inspector General shall
8 request that the Periodic Health Assessment for members of the Vermont
9 National Guard determine whether the Guard member was deployed to a
10 location that would make him or her eligible to participate in the U.S.
11 Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit
12 Registry, and whether the Guard member was exposed to open burn pits during
13 his or her deployment to that location.

14 (2) On or before July 1, 2019, the Adjutant and Inspector General shall
15 request that any member of the Vermont National Guard who during his or her
16 Periodic Health Assessment is identified as having been potentially exposed to
17 open burn pits during a deployment is automatically registered to participate in
18 the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit
19 Registry.

20 Sec. 5. EFFECTIVE DATE

21 This act shall take effect on passage.

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3 (Committee vote: _____)

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Senator _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE