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SYNOPSIS:

This bill would authorize the Alabama Department of Mental Health (ADMH) to work collaboratively with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (ADVA) to develop a comprehensive plan dedicated to the care, treatment, and recovery of Alabama veterans' behavioral health needs.

This bill would require the proposed plan to ensure that there is integration or coordination between the care of substance use disorders and other mental health conditions for those veterans who experience both, and for integration or coordination between care for behavioral health conditions and other components of health care for Alabama veterans.

A BILL

TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT

Relating to the Alabama Department of Mental Health; to add Chapter 58 of Title 22, Code of Alabama 1975; to require the Alabama Department of Mental Health to work collaboratively with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs to develop a comprehensive plan to address Alabama veterans' behavioral health needs and to provide funding of



29 certain programs addressing specific behavioral health needs.

30 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

31 Section 1. Chapter 58 is added to Title 22, Code of
32 Alabama 1975, to read as follows:

33 Chapter 58

34 §22-58-1

35 As used in this chapter, the following terms have the
36 following meanings:

37 (1) ADMH. The Alabama Department of Mental Health.

38 (2) ADMH COMMISSIONER. The Commissioner of the Alabama
39 Department of Mental Health.

40 (3) ADVA. The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.

41 (4) ADVA COMMISSIONER. The Commissioner of the Alabama
42 Department of Veterans Affairs.

43 (5) BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE. The prevention, diagnosis,
44 and treatment of mental health conditions, substance use
45 disorders, and behavioral health crisis.

46 (6) COMPREHENSIVE PLAN. The comprehensive plan
47 established pursuant to this chapter, as may be amended from
48 time to time, to address the behavioral health needs of
49 veterans as a supplement to services already offered in
50 Alabama.

51 (7) PTSD. Post traumatic stress disorder.

52 (8) RECOVERY. A process of change through which
53 individuals improve their health and wellness, live a
54 self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.

55 (9) TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY or TBI. An injury to the
56 brain caused by a forceful bump, blast, or jolt to the head or



57 body, or from an object that pierces the skull and enters the
58 brain, which can be the result of external forces, including,
59 but not limited to, assault or motor vehicle collisions.

60 (10) VETERAN. Any current resident of the state who:

61 a. Served in the active military, naval, air, or space
62 forces of the United States who was discharged or released
63 under conditions other than dishonorable;

64 b. Is or was a member of the Army National Guard or Air
65 National Guard who was discharged or released from service
66 under conditions other than dishonorable; or

67 c. Is or was a member of the reserve component of the
68 Armed Forces who was discharged or released from service under
69 conditions other than dishonorable.

70 §22-58-2

71 The Legislature finds the following:

72 (1) ADMH is the state's lead agency for this act, as
73 well as the expert in the following areas:

74 a. Knowledge and expertise in behavioral health care
75 services.

76 b. Certifications and implementation of the Certified
77 Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) model.

78 c. State and national standards of behavioral health
79 care, treatment, and services.

80 d. Infrastructure and best practices needed to
81 implement behavioral health care treatment, recovery, and
82 prevention services.

83 (2) ADVA is the state's expert in the following areas:

84 a. Military experience and culture.



85 b. Relationships and trust with Alabama veterans.

86 c. Knowledge of veterans' state and federal benefits
87 and resources.

88 d. Types of support needed for veterans to reintegrate
89 into civilian life.

90 §22-58-3

91 (a) The Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee is
92 established. The purpose of the committee is to develop a
93 comprehensive plan to address the behavioral health needs of
94 Alabama veterans.

95 (b) The committee shall include the following
96 individuals:

97 (1) The ADMH Commissioner, or his or her designee. The
98 ADMH Commissioner shall chair of the committee.

99 (2) The ADVA Commissioner, or his or her designee. The
100 ADVA Commissioner shall vice-chair the committee.

101 (3) The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
102 Commissioner, or his or her designee.

103 (4) The Adjutant General of the Alabama National Guard,
104 or his or her designee.

105 (5) During their tenure as legislators, the lead
106 sponsor for House Bill 197 and the lead sponsor for Senate
107 Bill 135 from the 2024 Regular Legislative Session, who, upon
108 leaving the Legislature, shall be replaced by the respective
109 chairs of the Senate and House Veterans and Military Affairs
110 Committees, or their designees.

111 (6) Representatives of two veterans service
112 organizations with expertise in mental health, substance use,



113 peer support, and other culturally competent care, appointed
114 by the ADVA Commissioner, who shall serve for initial terms of
115 one year and three years, respectively.

116 (7) Representatives of one other veterans support
117 organization, appointed by the ADVA Commissioner, who shall
118 serve for an initial term of four years, respectively.

119 (8) Three mental health and substance use providers
120 certified by ADMH who also serve veterans, appointed by the
121 ADMH Commissioner, who shall serve for initial terms of one,
122 two, and three years, respectively.

123 (9) The Associate Commissioner of the ADMH Division of
124 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services shall serve as an
125 ex-officio, non-voting member of the committee.

126 (10) The Veterans Well-Being Program Manager of the
127 ADVA shall serve as an ex-officio, non-voting member of the
128 committee.

129 (11) The Governor or his or her designee.

130 (12) The Lieutenant Governor or his or her designee.

131 (13) The Speaker of the Alabama House of
132 Representatives or his or her designee.

133 (14) The President Pro Tempore of the Senate, or his or
134 her designee.

135 (15) The minority leaders of the House of
136 Representatives and the Senate, or their designees.

137 (c) All appointing authorities shall coordinate their
138 appointments so that diversity of gender, race, and
139 geographical areas are reflective of the makeup of this state.
140 To the extent practicable, appointing authorities are



141 encouraged to prioritize appointments of service members,
142 veterans, and family members of veterans. The designee of a
143 committee member shall not be a health care provider or mental
144 health care provider.

145 (d) Meetings of the committee shall be held no less
146 than on a quarterly basis, or upon the call of the chair or a
147 majority of committee members. Appointments to the committee
148 shall be made by July 1, 2024, and the first meeting of the
149 committee shall be held by September 1, 2024. All meetings
150 shall comply with the Open Meetings Act.

151 §22-58-4

152 (a) ADMH shall work collaboratively with ADVA,
153 leveraging each other's roles, relationships, and expertise.
154 The committee shall develop a comprehensive plan in response
155 to a review of the following:

156 (1) The current state of Alabama veterans' mental
157 health and rates of substance use.

158 (2) Mental health, substance use, recovery, and other
159 veteran support services in Alabama.

160 (3) Needs assessments previously conducted for the
161 purpose of identifying gaps in services and support. The
162 review of needs assessments shall include qualitative and
163 quantitative feedback of post-9/11 veterans in Alabama, as
164 well as the need for additional services and coordination of
165 existing services.

166 (b) The review shall be completed by January 1, 2025.

167 (c) The committee shall consult with others, to include
168 the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the



169 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, as
170 appropriate, during the development of the comprehensive plan.

171 (d) ADMH shall align the comprehensive plan with state
172 and national behavioral health standards.

173 §22-58-5

174 (a) ADMH may establish pilot projects utilizing
175 existing evidence-based services certified by ADMH or
176 organizations which agree to become certified by ADMH. Pilot
177 projects shall be awarded funding by ADMH through a fair and
178 transparent request for proposal process. Pilot projects may
179 begin upon the appropriation of funds and certification of
180 projects.

181 (b) The pilot projects may include any of the
182 following:

183 (1) Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing
184 therapy as an evidence-based treatment for PTSD.

185 (2) TBI screenings integrated into behavioral health
186 services.

187 (3) Integrated behavioral health and primary care
188 models.

189 (4) Agencies that have successfully met the SAMHSA
190 criteria for the CCBHC model of care as certified by ADMH.

191 (c) Pilot projects shall be based on the findings of
192 the comprehensive plan.

193 §22-58-6

194 ADMH and ADVA shall present the proposed comprehensive
195 plan to the respective Veterans and Military Affairs
196 Committees of the Alabama House of Representatives and the



197 Alabama Senate for their review and input no later than April
198 1, 2025. ADMH shall then submit the proposed comprehensive
199 plan to the Governor by June 30, 2025, for review and
200 approval. The Governor shall act on the comprehensive plan no
201 later than August 31, 2025.

202 §22-58-7

203 (a) Upon approval of the Governor and subject to
204 sufficient appropriations, ADMH shall implement the
205 comprehensive plan with continued input from ADVA.

206 (b) ADMH shall contract with multiple entities to
207 implement pilot projects as described in Section 22-58-4 and
208 provide services under this chapter. Contracts for the
209 procurement of services shall be awarded on a competitive
210 basis through a request for proposal process. Both ADMH and
211 ADVA shall work collaboratively in the review and selection of
212 the proposals in a fair and transparent manner.

213 (c) ADMH and ADVA shall comply with federal ethics laws
214 in regard to its role in this chapter.

215 (d) Implementation of this chapter shall be contingent
216 upon new funds appropriated by the Legislature. Nothing in this
217 act shall require existing resources to be diverted for this
218 purpose.

219 (e) All pilot projects and services implemented under
220 this act shall comply with all requirements, including data
221 reporting and certification standards, set out by ADMH. If a
222 recipient of funds fails to meet those requirements, ADMH may
223 demand recovery of the full amount of funds awarded. Upon
224 notification of any demand, ADMH shall also notify the



225 committee outlining the rationale for taking that action.

226 (f) During the committee's regular meetings, ADMH shall
227 update the committee on the progress of the comprehensive
228 plan's implementation.

229 (g) The committee shall conduct an annual review and may
230 make formal recommendations regarding the comprehensive plan.
231 ADMH shall align these recommendations to state and national
232 behavioral health standards and submit them to the Governor for
233 approval.

234 (h) To inform this annual review, ADMH shall report
235 annually to the committee the approximate number of veterans
236 served through the pilot projects, the services provided by
237 pilot projects, and the amount of funding expended for this
238 purpose, as well as other available datapoints as determined by
239 the committee.

240 (i) Nothing in this act shall supersede or diminish the
241 existing powers enumerated to ADMH.

242 Section 2. This act shall become effective June 1,
243 2024.