

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021**

H

1

HOUSE BILL 370

Short Title: No Veteran Left Behind. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Bell, Moore, Cleveland, and Miller (Primary Sponsors).
For a complete list of sponsors, refer to the North Carolina General Assembly web site.

Referred to: Homeland Security, Military, and Veterans Affairs, if favorable, Appropriations, if favorable, Rules, Calendar, and Operations of the House

March 24, 2021

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM TO EXPAND THE VETERANS JUSTICE INTERVENTION PROGRAM AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE PROGRAM.

Whereas, veterans suffer from unique mental health and substance abuse issues which may exceed the capabilities of many local communities, especially law enforcement; and

Whereas, the Veterans Justice Intervention (VJI) program works to avoid the unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among veterans by ensuring that eligible, justice-involved veterans have timely access to Veterans Health Administration (VHA) services; and

Whereas, "justice-involved veterans" are veterans who have crisis encounters with law enforcement in the community, are jailed for relatively brief periods of time for offenses that do not result in prison time, and/or are adjudicated or monitored by either local criminal courts or specialty treatment courts, such as drug and mental health courts, usually for extended periods of time; and

Whereas, VJI Specialists provide direct outreach, assessment, and case management for justice-involved veterans in local courts and jails and liaison with local justice system partners. VJI Specialists also serve as a liaison to Veterans Treatment Courts, Crisis Intervention Teams in police departments, and probation and parole officers; and

Whereas, the VJI program also helps to prevent homelessness among justice-involved veterans; and

Whereas, a pilot program to evaluate the expansion of the VJI program in North Carolina would be beneficial to the State's veterans; Now, therefore, The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. There is appropriated from the General Fund to The Independence Fund, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of veterans and their families, the sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2021-2022 fiscal year to establish and implement a pilot program to expand the Veterans Justice Intervention (VJI) program in Brunswick, Craven, Cumberland, Onslow, Union, and Wayne Counties. These funds may be used to hire or contract a subject matter expert for assessment, coordination, and VJI implementation in each of the designated counties.

SECTION 2. In conducting the pilot program, The Independence Fund, Inc., shall:

- (1) Partner with other nonprofits, State and local governments, and federal agencies to develop and assess each county's initial response to veterans in



- 1 crises and conclude with an updated data collection process map developed
- 2 for each county.
- 3 (2) Educate first responders, local community support employees, and others on
- 4 veteran-specific crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and VA resources
- 5 available.
- 6 (3) Execute new training plans based on the data collection process maps
- 7 developed for each county.
- 8 (4) Monitor the pilot program and maintain regular contact with each county to
- 9 ensure up-to-date training and availability and allocation of resources.

10 **SECTION 3.** By June 30, 2022, The Independence Fund, Inc., shall report on the
11 effectiveness of the pilot program, including the feasibility of expanding the program throughout
12 the State, to the Joint Legislative Committees on General Government and Justice and Public
13 Safety and the Fiscal Research Division.

14 **SECTION 4.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.