

ASSEMBLY, No. 5110

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED DECEMBER 10, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman RONALD S. DANCER

District 12 (Burlington, Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblyman Rumpf

SYNOPSIS

Requires DMVA establish Veterans Outdoor Recovery Task Force.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/23/2021)

1 **AN ACT** requiring the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
2 to establish a Veterans Outdoor Recovery Task Force.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that research has shown
8 that being outdoors has restorative powers, helping to inspire people
9 and heal their bodies and spirits. Research has also shown that
10 outdoor recreation can be an effective form of treatment,
11 rehabilitation, and healing for veterans.

12 According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs
13 National Center for PTSD, between 11 and 20 percent of veterans
14 who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring
15 Freedom and 12 percent of veterans who served in Operation Desert
16 Storm suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder in a given year,
17 and 30 percent of veterans who served in Vietnam have suffered
18 post-traumatic stress disorder in their lifetime.

19 Veterans have given so much for this State and country that an
20 effort to eliminate barriers and provide more public outdoor space
21 for use by veterans is necessary and appropriate.

22
23 2. a. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs shall
24 establish a task force to be known as the Veterans Outdoor
25 Recovery Task Force. The task force shall consist of the following
26 members, or their designees: the Adjutant General of the
27 Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; the Commissioner of
28 the Department of Environmental Protection; the Commissioner of
29 Health; the Commissioner of Human Services; the Commissioner of
30 the Department of Agriculture; and any additional member that the
31 Adjutant General deems necessary and appropriate.

32 b. The members of the task force shall be appointed and shall
33 hold their initial organizational meeting within 45 days after the
34 effective date of this act. The task force may appoint a secretary,
35 who need not be a member of the task force.

36 c. The Adjutant General and the Commissioner of the
37 Department of Environmental Protection, or their designees, shall
38 serve as co-chairs of the task force. The task force shall meet at the
39 call of the co-chairs. The task force shall hold at least three public
40 hearings in different parts of the State and elicit testimony from the
41 public at such times and places as the co-chairs shall designate.

42
43 3. It shall be the duty of the task force to:

44 a. identify opportunities to formalize coordination between the
45 Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, public land agencies,
46 and organizations regarding the use of public lands or other outdoor
47 spaces for medical treatment and therapy for veterans;

A5110 DANCER

3

b. identify barriers that exist to providing veterans with opportunities for medical treatment and therapy through the use of outdoor recreation on public lands or other outdoor spaces; and

c. develop recommendations to better facilitate the use of public lands or other outdoor spaces for preventative care, medical treatment, and therapy for veterans.

4. The task force shall make recommendations for legislation or such other action as it deems appropriate with regard to improving, expanding, and facilitating the use of public lands and outdoor spaces to assist veterans with their healing and recovery.

5. The task force shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission or agency, as it may require and as may be available for its purposes.

6. As used in this act,
“public lands” means any recreational land under the jurisdiction
of the Federal, State or local government; and

“veteran” means any person discharged from the Armed Forces of the United States or a Reserve component thereof, including the National Guard, under conditions other than dishonorable.

7. The task force shall report its findings and recommendations to the Legislature, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), and the Governor within eighteen months of its initial organizational meeting. The report shall be publicly accessible and posted on the websites of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Department of Environmental Protection.

8. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire after the task force submits its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature.

STATEMENT

Research has shown that being outdoors has restorative powers, helping to inspire people and heal their bodies and spirits. Research has also shown that outdoor recreation can be an effective form of treatment, rehabilitation, and healing for veterans. According to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for PTSD, between 11 and 20 percent of veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and 12 percent of veterans who served in Operation Desert Storm have post-traumatic stress disorder in a given year, and 30 percent of

A5110 DANCER

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1 veterans who served in Vietnam will have had post-traumatic stress
2 disorder in their lifetime. Veterans have given so much for this
3 State and country that an effort to eliminate barriers and provide
4 more public outdoor space for use by veterans is necessary and
5 appropriate.

6 The task force will:
7 identify opportunities to formalize coordination between the
8 Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, public land agencies,
9 and organizations regarding the use of public lands or other outdoor
10 spaces for medical treatment and therapy for veterans;
11 identify barriers that exist to providing veterans with
12 opportunities for medical treatment and therapy through the use of
13 outdoor recreation on public lands or other outdoor spaces; and
14 develop recommendations to better facilitate the use of public
15 lands or other outdoor spaces for preventative care, medical
16 treatment, and therapy for veterans.

17 The task force may make recommendations for legislation or
18 such other action as it deems appropriate with regard to improving,
19 expanding, and facilitating the use of public lands and outdoor
20 spaces to assist veterans with their healing and recovery.

21 Under the bill, the term veteran means any person discharged
22 from the Armed Forces of the United States or a Reserve
23 component thereof, including the National Guard, under conditions
24 other than dishonorable.

25 The task force will report its findings and recommendations to
26 the Legislature and the Governor within eighteen months of its
27 initial organizational meeting. The report will be publicly available
28 and posted on the websites of the Department of Military and
29 Veterans and the Department of Environmental Protection. The
30 task force will expire after the submission of its report.

31 This bill is modeled on federal legislation that unanimously
32 passed both houses of Congress.