

Veterans' Affairs Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5563

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A TRAINING PROGRAM FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND
POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER ISSUES IMPACTING VETERANS

Title: INVOLVED IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.

Vote Date: 3/12/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/14/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Veterans' Affairs Committee

Rep. Themis Klarides

Rep. Tom O'Dea

Rep. Noreen S. Kokoruda

Rep. Robin Green

Rep. Vincent J. Candelora

Rep. Arthur J. O'Neill

Rep. Lezlye Zupkus

Rep. Anne Dauphinais

REASONS FOR BILL:

Veterans are at a high risk of experiencing mental health or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)-related issues, which can often manifest in a variety of ways and be difficult for others to recognize or understand. While the Judicial Branch provides training for its judges, there is currently no ongoing training program regarding the issues of mental health and PTSD facing veterans in the judicial system. H.B. No. 5563 would implement such training, with the goal of providing judges with the information necessary to make informed sentencing decisions regarding veterans with mental health issues or PTSD.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Cheryl MacDonald, External Affairs Division, Connecticut Judicial Branch](#): On behalf of the Connecticut Judicial Branch, Ms. MacDonald testified that it is important for judges to be trained to recognize mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder issues faced by veterans, and as a result the Judicial Branch has trained judges on specific veterans' issues.

Ms. MacDonald included in her testimony a selection of events relating to veterans' issues that the Judicial Branch has hosted, and requested that the bill not be enacted, as the judicial branch has always trained its judges and will continue to do so.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[House Republican Office](#): The House Republican Office stressed that H.B. No. 5563 was an opportunity for bi-partisan cooperation to support improving existing veterans' services, and urged the committee to allow H.B. No. 5563 to be debated by the full General Assembly.

[K. Robert Lewis, Chairman, the American Legion Department of Connecticut Legislative Committee](#): Mr. Lewis noted that the American Legion is concerned about the intersection of PTSD and the criminal justice system, and supports efforts that will allow judges to make more informed decisions when sentencing veterans.

[Daniel C. Thurston, Chairman, Connecticut Veterans and Military Coalition](#): Mr. Thurston invoked the adage "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," stating that it was of the utmost importance that the community and the criminal justice system be aware of the effects of PTSD.

[David McGuire, Executive Director, American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut](#): Mr. McGuire, drawing on the ACLU's long history of fighting for the rights of those involved in the criminal justice system, emphasized the CT-ACLU's support for requiring judges to be provided with the information needed to make well-informed decisions regarding defendants and their cases. Mr. McGuire also urged the committee to expand the bill beyond veterans, and to require training related to mental health and PTSD issues facing all people involved in the criminal justice system.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed for H.B. No. 5563

Reported by: Benjamin S. Watson, Asst. Clerk Date: March 15th, 2019