

# Veterans' Affairs Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-778

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A GREEN ALERT SYSTEM FOR MISSING

**Title:** VETERANS.

**Vote Date:** 2/19/2019

**Vote Action:** Vote to Draft

**PH Date:** 2/14/2019

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Veterans' Affairs Committee  
Sen. Eric C. Berthel, 32<sup>nd</sup> Dist.  
Sen. John A. Kissel, 7<sup>th</sup> Dist.  
Sen. Rob Sampson, 16<sup>th</sup> Dist.  
Rep. Tami Zawistowski, 61<sup>st</sup> Dist.

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Currently, Connecticut has no designated system in place specifically to identify missing at-risk veterans. The proposed bill aims to change that by creating a Green Alert (similar to an Amber or Silver Alert) that would notify the public when an at-risk veteran was reported missing. Veterans suffer from a higher rate of suicide than the general public, and this bill would ensure that the entire state would be made aware of a situation in which a veteran with a high risk of self-harm was reported missing.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

None expressed for S.B. No. 778

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Eric C. Berthel, Senator, Connecticut General Assembly](#): Citing similar legislation passed in Wisconsin, Senator Berthel explained that S.B. No. 778 would implement a system not unlike the existing Amber and Silver Alert systems to notify the public through the interruption of radio and television broadcasts, as well as the use of DOT highway signs, of a missing at-risk veteran. The senator closed his testimony by noting that 36 veterans from Connecticut took

their own lives in 2016, and that we must give our veterans the resources and aid required to come back safely and continue to succeed once they are home.

[Dave Butkus, Selectman, Town of Bethlehem](#): Mr. Butkus, a Navy veteran and Service Officer for POST 146 American Legion in Bethlehem, testified that Wisconsin has passed a similar bill, and that the legislatures of Tennessee and Delaware are currently considering such proposals as well. Like Senator Berthel, Mr. Butkus compared the Green Alert system to existing Amber and Silver Alerts, and referred to the story of Corey Adams, a veteran who was added to the missing persons list eight days after he was reported missing. The discovery of Mr. Adams' body was the genesis of the aforementioned Wisconsin Green Alert law. Mr. Butkus stated that a Green Alert law in Connecticut could potentially prevent tragedies like the case of Mr. Adams.

[Grace Dowling](#): Ms. Dowling, a high school student from Suffield and active member of the American Legion Auxiliary Post #36, brought the idea for a Green Alert system to her legislators last spring, after her Civics class gave her an assignment to "undertake a project that would make a change in society." Ms. Dowling noted that the risk of self-harm for missing veterans is high, and that as a society we owe it to our veterans to make sure they are safe. In her closing argument, Ms. Dowling observed that a Green Alert system would not only make a difference in the lives of at risk veterans, but would also help their friends, families, and communities.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Stephen Kennedy, Connecticut Team Leader, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America](#): Mr. Kennedy noted the prevalence of suicide among veterans, including an IAVA survey in which 59% of respondents reported that they had lost a comrade to suicide. Mr. Kennedy also explained that the stigma surrounding mental illness is especially acute in veteran communities, and that such stigma necessitates that a Green Alert system must also protect the privacy of veterans. To balance these competing needs, Mr. Kennedy suggested that Connecticut follow a system similar to the Veterans Crisis Line, which notifies local authorities and members of the community who know the missing veteran. By alerting relevant authorities rather than the general public, the privacy of the veteran would be protected while still ensuring that the authorities interacting with the veteran were aware of any issues that may complicate matters. Mr. Kennedy concluded by stating that the IAVA would support any effort to reduce the suicide risk among veterans, provided such an effort also protected the privacy of the veterans.

**Reported by: Benjamin S. Watson, Asst. Clerk      Date: March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019**