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Representative Diamond and Senator Burgess File Bipartisan Legislation to Prevent Veteran Suicide in Florida

Tallahassee, FL – State Representative Ben Diamond (D- St. Petersburg) and State Senator Danny Burgess (R- Zephyrhills) have filed legislation to implement the **Veteran Suicide Prevention Pilot Program** in Florida. [HB 1351](#) and [SB 1712](#) will establish a pilot program directing the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs to offer each county and city veteran service officer specialized training and certification in preventing veteran suicide. Veteran service officers participating in the program will receive training to provide emergency crisis counseling for veterans experiencing an emotional or mental health crisis.

"The epidemic of veteran suicide is both unacceptable and preventable. More than 1.5 million veterans call Florida home, and we owe them a debt of gratitude we can never fully repay," said **Representative Ben Diamond**. "We have a responsibility to honor their service with the support they need to thrive. The Veteran Suicide Prevention Pilot Program will strengthen state and local efforts to improve veterans' access to quality mental health care and end the veteran suicide epidemic."

Each year more than 500 veterans in Florida take their own lives. Despite a [federal report](#) suggesting a decrease in veteran suicides in 2019, the Veteran Crisis Line, a national 24/7 suicide prevention hotline, has [reported](#) a significant increase in calls, online chats, and texts since 2020. The Crisis Center of Tampa Bay has also reported an increase in crisis and suicide prevention calls.

"The statistics tell a devastating story; our heroes need help," added **Senator Danny Burgess**, former Executive Director of the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. "Fortunately, Florida has committed to protecting those who protected us. Our Veteran Service Officers are on the frontlines every day as the first point of contact for veterans in crisis. This pilot program provides additional specialized training for our VSOs with an emphasis on suicide prevention."

“As an infantry combatant of the Vietnam War, I have not only experienced the emotional and moral injury that war inflicts, but also the loss of a friend, a fellow combat veteran, to suicide,” said Vietnam veteran and Silver Star recipient **Major John Kieffer**. “The Veteran Suicide Prevention Pilot Program will be a critical element in saving our precious veterans who suffer from such invisible injuries.”

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If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255 or chat online at [Http://VeteransCrisisLine.Net/Chat](http://VeteransCrisisLine.Net/Chat).) Veterans in Florida can call the Florida Veterans Support Line at 1-844-MyFLVet (693-5838) or 2-1-1.