

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2021 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**Third Reader**

Senate Bill 164

(Senator Simonaire)

Finance

Health and Government Operations

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**Veterans - Behavioral Health Services - Mental Health First Aid**

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This bill requires the Maryland Department of Health (MDH) to include mental health first aid among the behavioral health services for which MDH provides service coordination for eligible veterans. Mental health first aid must consist of training for veterans and their immediate family members on how to identify and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. Each entity teaching a mental health first aid course must report to MDH the number of veterans and their family members who took the course. By June 1, 2023, and annually thereafter, MDH must report to the Governor and the General Assembly the total number of veterans and family members who took a mental health first aid course and the total number of courses taught in the State.

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** The bill largely codifies current practice. The bill's reporting requirements can be handled with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

**Local Effect:** None.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** Subject to the limitations of its budget, MDH must (in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, the Maryland National Guard, and the Maryland Defense Force provide behavioral health service coordination to eligible veterans. Where services are not yet available or accessible at the federal level, MDH must connect eligible veterans to behavioral health

services that may be available through its Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) until federal services can be obtained. For services provided, MDH must seek reimbursement from the VA or other responsible public or private payer and account separately for funds used to provide behavioral health services.

**Additional Comments:** BHA advises that Maryland's Commitment to Veterans is responsible for providing behavioral health care coordination to veterans and their families. Mental health first aid is currently included among these services. BHA does not anticipate that the bill will change the way this program operates. However, BHA notes that mental health first aid is a proprietary program. Currently, only one organization provides this training in Maryland: the Mental Health Association of Maryland.

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### **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** SB 324 of 2020 passed in the Senate and received a hearing in the House Health and Government Operations Committee, but no further action was taken.

**Designated Cross File:** HB 605 (Delegate Kipke) - Health and Government Operations.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Department of Health; Department of Veterans Affairs; Military Department; Department of Legislative Services

**Fiscal Note History:** First Reader - January 21, 2021  
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Analysis by: Amber R. Gundlach

Direct Inquiries to:  
(410) 946-5510  
(301) 970-5510