STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DIVISION OF LONG TERM SUPPORTS AND SERVICES

BUREAU OF ELDERLY AND ADULT SERVICES

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Lori A. Weaver
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November 17, 2023

The Honorable Mark Pearson, Chairman
Health and Human Services Oversight Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 205-207
33 North State Street
Concord, NH 03301

Re: SB 174, relative to veterans access to health care and mental health services

Dear Chairman Pearson:

On June 7 2023, Senate Bill 174, relative to veterans access to health care, was signed into law by Governor Sununu.

In furtherance of the legislation's purpose and objectives, Senate Bill 174, Chapter 74:2 Laws 2023, provides the following requirement:

> Chapter 74:2, relative to veterans access to health care and mental health services. By November 1, 2023, the department of health and human services, in collaboration with the department of military affairs and veterans services (DMAVS), shall report to the joint legislative oversight committee on health and human services, established in RSA 126-A:13, on veterans' access to health care and mental health services.

Accordingly, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and DMAVS continue to retain responsibility for their respective services while coordinating with each other to integrate access to those services. DHHS and DMAVS currently work in tandem to address the needs of NH individuals who have served or are currently serving in the military. There are a variety of groups, coalitions and organizations serving veterans statewide to meet needs in a variety of areas and more are in development.

New Hampshire's Military Leadership Team guides and the State Veterans Advisory Committee in their role continually evaluates the status of New Hampshire's services to Veterans.

DMAVS' Division of Veteran's Services assists Veterans who are residents of New Hampshire or their dependents in securing all benefits or preferences to which they may be entitled under any state or federal laws or regulations. The Division averages about 4,000 contacts (phone and email) with Veterans a month growing up to almost 6,000 call a month during the PACT ACT enrollment period.

DMAVS, in partnership with DHHS, the New Hampshire National Guard, the NH Suicide Prevention Council (SPC), and other NH State Departments and community providers are committed to preventing suicide among Veterans through participation in the SPC Military & Veteran Committee. These actions include support to the DHHS led efforts with the recent Governor's Suicide Prevention Week and supporting activities such as the Strong as Granite campaign, the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline and a number of collaborative training efforts including ASIST and Connect Online.

DMAVS state funding for Easterseals NH (ESNH) enhanced clinical capacity to improve access to, and use of, mental/behavioral health services by NH's service members, veterans, and families for a lifelong journey to health, well-being and self-sufficiency, and lessen Veteran social isolation. Since the collaboration began in September 2022 through September 2023, ESNH has made 1500 external linkages highlighted by 61 x Medical/Health Care, 107 x Mental Health Services, 268 x Benefits/Eligibility determination, 235 x Housing Services, 204 x Aging/Senior Services, and a range of other support activities.

DMAVS state funding for the Partnership for Public Health from November 2022 to June 2023 addressed Veteran suicide and social isolation, initiating a statewide assessment and establishment of coalitions across the DHHS' 13 Regional Health Networks. The funding supported 86 engagements in support of building new coalitions and maintaining existing coalitions. Efforts addressed substance misuse, suicide prevention, behavioral health, emergency preparedness and response, immunization programs, and public health councils. The coalition creation and support included regions of Greater Nashua, the Seacoast, Greater Manchester, Carroll County, and the Lakes Region.

The Community Behavioral Health Association and Aging and Disability Resource Centers provide statewide coverage and partner with DMAVS. For more information on New Hampshire's Veterans, anyone can visit the DVAVS website and view the 2023 Snapshot at: https://www.dmavs.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt401/files/documents/2023-05/nh-military-snapshot-rev2023-final.pdf

DMAVS, in partnership with DHHS and other key stakeholders, are committed to maintaining a robust and effective "*Ask the Question*" program to inspire and empower care providers and multiple sectors, to facilitate Veterans ability to get the support they need. Adding the question, "have you or a family member ever served in the military" as part of intake/enrollment/health history forms opens the conversation between provider and Veteran enabling addressing "what's next" in providing culturally competent care.

Currently established programs and partnerships collaborate to evaluate the needs of Veterans and their families, they work together to address barriers to accessing mental health services and strengthen suicide prevention programs. Other examples include:

- DMAVS team is dedicated to working with DHHS and the Department of Veterans Affairs to meet the needs of veterans experiencing homelessness and DMAVS coordinates the efforts of local, state, federal, and non-profit organizations providing community based programs and services for veterans experiencing housing challenges.
- Additionally, DHHS's Aging and Disability Resource Centers, also known as ServiceLink, DMVAS's Veteran Service Officers provide a more coordinated system of guidance, support and access which is available statewide.
- Community Mental Health Centers Statewide have identified Military Liaisons to assist and support NH's Service members, veterans, and their families;
- Military Culture training is offered in a variety of settings and pathways to ensure our workforce has the knowledge, skills and tools to provide guidance, support, and help.

DMAVS and NH Employment Security's managed NH Veteran-Friendly Businesses network leverages Military Culture Training along with other training focused on developing and sustaining Veteran wellness in the workplace including suicide prevention and a recovery friendly workplace.

- DMAVS supports the Department of Veterans Affairs community engagement and partnerships in NH's efforts to establish community coalitions to combat suicide among Veterans as well as the emerging Veterans Health Administration's Veteran-Community Partnership program toward fostering seamless access to a full continuum of care and support services for Veterans and their families.

DHHS and the DMAVS will continue provide leadership and support to continuously improve and build on the strength of existing entities in order to address the needs of individuals who have served or are currently serving in the military, and their families. Although not required by this report, DHHS and DMVAS respectfully reserves the opportunity to provide an addendum or update to this report to the Legislative and Executive Branches based on additional relevant information moving forward with implementation of SB 174. If you have any questions on this report or need any additional assistance, please contact:

- Wendi Aultman, Bureau Chief, Bureau of Elderly and Adult Services at (603) 271-9068 or Wendi.Aultman@dhhs.nh.gov; or
- Brenton K. Fraser, Director, Division of Community Based Military Programs at (603) 227-1403 or Brenton.k.fraser@dmavs.nh.gov

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Hardy

Melissa A. Hardy
Director

cc: Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Oversight Committee