

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2021

H.B. 370
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HOUSE PRINCIPAL CLERK

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HOUSE BILL DRH30182-LGa-55A

Short Title: No Veteran Left Behind. (Public)

Sponsors: Representatives Bell, Moore, Cleveland, and Miller (Primary Sponsors).

Referred to:

1 A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
2 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM TO EXPAND THE VETERANS JUSTICE
3 INTERVENTION PROGRAM AND APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR THE PROGRAM.

4 Whereas, veterans suffer from unique mental health and substance abuse issues which
5 may exceed the capabilities of many local communities, especially law enforcement; and

6 Whereas, the Veterans Justice Intervention (VJI) program works to avoid the
7 unnecessary criminalization of mental illness and extended incarceration among veterans by
8 ensuring that eligible, justice-involved veterans have timely access to Veterans Health
9 Administration (VHA) services; and

10 Whereas, "justice-involved veterans" are veterans who have crisis encounters with
11 law enforcement in the community, are jailed for relatively brief periods of time for offenses that
12 do not result in prison time, and/or are adjudicated or monitored by either local criminal courts
13 or specialty treatment courts, such as drug and mental health courts, usually for extended periods
14 of time; and

15 Whereas, VJI Specialists provide direct outreach, assessment, and case management
16 for justice-involved veterans in local courts and jails and liaison with local justice system
17 partners. VJI Specialists also serve as a liaison to Veterans Treatment Courts, Crisis Intervention
18 Teams in police departments, and probation and parole officers; and

19 Whereas, the VJI program also helps to prevent homelessness among justice-involved
20 veterans; and

21 Whereas, a pilot program to evaluate the expansion of the VJI program in North
22 Carolina would be beneficial to the State's veterans; Now, therefore,
23 The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

24 **SECTION 1.** There is appropriated from the General Fund to The Independence
25 Fund, Inc., a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the lives of veterans and their
26 families, the sum of five hundred thousand dollars (\$500,000) in nonrecurring funds for the
27 2021-2022 fiscal year to establish and implement a pilot program to expand the Veterans Justice
28 Intervention (VJI) program in Brunswick, Craven, Cumberland, Onslow, Union, and Wayne
29 Counties. These funds may be used to hire or contract a subject matter expert for assessment,
30 coordination, and VJI implementation in each of the designated counties.

31 **SECTION 2.** In conducting the pilot program, The Independence Fund, Inc., shall:
32 (1) Partner with other nonprofits, State and local governments, and federal
33 agencies to develop and assess each county's initial response to veterans in
34 crises and conclude with an updated data collection process map developed
35 for each county.



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- 1 (2) Educate first responders, local community support employees, and others on
2 veteran-specific crisis intervention, suicide prevention, and VA resources
3 available.
4 (3) Execute new training plans based on the data collection process maps
5 developed for each county.
6 (4) Monitor the pilot program and maintain regular contact with each county to
7 ensure up-to-date training and availability and allocation of resources.

8 **SECTION 3.** By June 30, 2022, The Independence Fund, Inc., shall report on the
9 effectiveness of the pilot program, including the feasibility of expanding the program throughout
10 the State, to the Joint Legislative Committees on General Government and Justice and Public
11 Safety and the Fiscal Research Division.

12 **SECTION 4.** This act becomes effective July 1, 2021.