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**An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the
Commission To Strengthen and Align the Services Provided
to Maine's Veterans by Establishing an Interagency
Council To Coordinate Services for Homeless Veterans**

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:

Sec. 1. 5 MRSA §12004-L, sub-§14 is enacted to read:

14.

Maine Interagency Council to
Coordinate Services to Homeless
Veterans

Not Authorized

37-B MRSA §513-A

Sec. 2. 37-B MRSA §513-A is enacted to read:

§ 513-A. Maine Interagency Council to Coordinate Services to Homeless Veterans

1. Maine Interagency Council to Coordinate Services to Homeless Veterans; established. The Maine Interagency Council to Coordinate Services to Homeless Veterans, referred to in this section as "the council," is established to maximize services provided by state and federal agencies and other organizations dedicated to serving veterans in the State.

2. Members. The council consists of the following 8 members:

A. The director, who is the chair of the council;

B. The Director of the Maine State Housing Authority, or a designee;

C. A representative of the Department of Health and Human Services who oversees the administration of services and benefits to residents of the State at risk of being homeless, appointed by the Commissioner of Health and Human Services;

D. The Commissioner of Transportation, or a designee;

E. The Commissioner of Corrections, or a designee;

F. A representative of a nonprofit homelessness services provider, appointed by the director;

G. A member of the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over veterans affairs, appointed jointly by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and

H. One additional member that a majority of the members of the council determines would contribute to the efforts of the council.

3. Terms. Members appointed pursuant to paragraph F and named pursuant to paragraph H serve 2-year terms. A legislative member serves during the term of office for which the member was elected.

4. Advisory group of federal agency representatives. The council may form an advisory group of federal agency representatives that may include representatives of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs' supportive services for veteran families program.

5. Meetings. The council shall meet at least 4 times per year at a time and location determined by the director, except that the council is not required to meet more than once in 2016.

6. Duties; strategic plan. The council is charged with developing strategies to enhance coordination and communication among agencies and organizations that provide services that seek to place veterans in permanent housing and that seek to improve access to services known to support housing stability for veterans who are experiencing homelessness or veterans who are at risk of homelessness. The council shall develop a strategic plan that:

A. Establishes a baseline for homelessness in the State from which improvements can be measured. In determining the baseline, the council is not required to use the federal definition of homelessness and may include levels of housing instability or ranges of homelessness;

B. Develops a method of measuring the problem of homelessness among veterans in the State in a manner that demonstrates whether or not efforts to reduce the number of homeless veterans in the State have been successful;

C. Identifies specific processes for improving communication among agencies that provide services to veterans, including services unrelated to homelessness, that will facilitate identification of veterans in need of housing assistance or veterans who may be at risk of homelessness and maximize resources available to address the problem of homelessness among veterans; and

D. Develops a framework and timeline for determining progress of communication and coordination efforts targeting the problem of homelessness among veterans and the effectiveness of those efforts at reducing the problem of homelessness among veterans.

7. Lead agency; staff. The bureau is designated as the lead agency responsible for carrying out the duties of the council and the requirements of this section. The director is authorized to establish a position within the bureau to facilitate the purposes of this section and provide staff services to the council.

8. Report. The council shall submit a report of its efforts to develop enhanced methods of communication among providers of services to veterans, recommendations to maximize existing services to address homelessness among veterans and recommendations to increase access to services that support the placement of veterans in suitable, permanent housing. The report and any suggestions for

legislation must be submitted no later than February 15th annually to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over veterans affairs and the committee is authorized to submit legislation to implement the recommendations included in the council's report.

Sec. 3. Initial meeting; initial members. The Director of the Bureau of Maine Veterans' Services within the Department of Defense, Veterans and Emergency Management shall convene the initial meeting of the Maine Interagency Council to Coordinate Services to Homeless Veterans established in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 37-B, section 513-A no later than December 1, 2016. Except for the member described in Title 37-B, section 513-A, paragraph H, initial council members must be named and their names provided to the Director of the Bureau of Maine Veterans' Services no later than October 15, 2016.

SUMMARY

This bill was submitted by the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs pursuant to Resolve 2015, chapter 48. The bill implements some of the recommendations made by the Commission To Strengthen and Align the Services Provided to Maine's Veterans. The bill establishes an interagency council to address homelessness among veterans by maximizing existing services, enhancing communication among providers and improving access to services that support permanent and stable housing for veterans.