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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

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A N A C T

RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE -- VETERANS IDENTIFICATION IN THE
CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Introduced By: Senators E Morgan, Raptakis, Rogers, Patalano, Dimitri, Felag, Urso,
Thompson, Paolino, and Ciccone

Date Introduced: March 04, 2026

Referred To: Senate Special Legislation and Veterans Affairs

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 12 of the General Laws entitled "CRIMINAL PROCEDURE" is hereby
2 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 34

4 VETERANS IDENTIFICATION IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

5 **12-34-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Veterans Identification
7 in the Criminal Justice System Act."

8 **12-34-2. Definitions.**

9 As used in this chapter:

10 (1) "Accountability courts" means the veterans treatment courts and other specialty courts
11 (drug, mental health, or family courts).

12 (2) "Community supervision" means probation or parole under Title 13.

13 (3) "Diversion programs" means any mechanism applied after charges are filed, including
14 accountability courts and prosecutor programs.

15 (4) "Identity attributes for individuals" means and includes name, date of birth, Social
16 Security Number, and gender.

17 (5) "Law enforcement partners" means and includes police departments, sheriff
18 departments, courts, jails, and deflection initiatives collaborating with law enforcement.

1 (6) "Local deflection initiative" means a community-based coalition assisting individuals
2 with substance use disorder, mental health disorder, or co-occurring disorders via connection with
3 local behavioral health systems following contact with law enforcement.

4 (7) "Status query and response exchange system" or "SQUARES" means a web application
5 of the VA providing verified information about veteran status, eligibility for healthcare, and VA
6 programs.

7 (8) "Veterans justice outreach program" means the VA office charged with early
8 identification of justice-involved veterans and facilitating access to services.

9 (9) "Veterans justice outreach specialists" means VA representatives tasked with
10 identifying justice-involved veterans, conducting outreach, facilitating access to VA and other
11 services, and providing case management.

12 (10) "Veterans reentry search service" or "VRSS" means the secure database maintained
13 by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs enabling correctional and criminal justice
14 entities to identify veterans.

15 (11) "Veteran sentencing option" means a statutory provision where disposition is
16 postponed pending completion of a therapeutic case plan administered by a judge and community
17 supervision.

18 **12-34-3. Definition of "veteran" for criminal justice system.**

19 (1) For purposes of identification in the Rhode Island criminal justice system, a "veteran"
20 is a person who:

21 (i) Swore an oath and entered any branch of the Armed Forces, including the National
22 Guard or Reserves, and is:

23 (ii) Currently serving; or

24 (iii) Was discharged, that was not a dishonorable discharge, unless the individual with a
25 dishonorable discharge has been diagnosed with substance use disorder, military sexual trauma,
26 traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, or another mental health condition.

27 (2) This definition does not affect veteran status for any other purpose and does not create
28 additional rights or benefits.

29 **12-34-4. Law enforcement applicability.**

30 (a) Within twenty-four (24) hours of any law enforcement contact, with or without an
31 arrest, the administrator of the local law enforcement department shall:

32 (1) Provide necessary information for verification through SQUARES to the Rhode Island
33 department of veterans services (RIVETS), if applicable, to verify the veteran status of all
34 individuals who have made contact with law enforcement.

- 1 (i) The administrator may coordinate with the RIVETS to ensure verification.
- 2 (ii) In the absence of the administrator shall request the veterans justice outreach specialist
3 to conduct verification of veteran status.
- 4 (2) In the absence of a designated partner as in subsection (a)(1) of this section, the local
5 law enforcement department shall conduct verification using VRSS or similar federal service, or
6 request verification from a veterans justice outreach specialist.
- 7 (b) Each week, RIVETS shall submit a report identifying each individual whose veteran
8 status was verified during the previous week to:
- 9 (1) The Rhode Island department of veterans services under title 42;
- 10 (2) The nearest veterans justice outreach specialist;
- 11 (3) The court where charges are pending;
- 12 (4) Judge, prosecuting attorney, managing public defender, and the veteran-client's
13 attorney of record; and
- 14 (5) Coordinator of any specialty court program authorized by the Rhode Island supreme
15 court.
- 16 (c) The administrator shall provide veteran arrestees or inmates reasonable access to:
- 17 (1) Deflection initiative personnel;
- 18 (2) Rhode Island department of veterans services;
- 19 (3) VA representatives to facilitate applications for:
- 20 (i) Identification and referral to community resources;
- 21 (ii) Federal or state benefits or compensation;
- 22 (iii) Treatment through veterans treatment specialty courts or other accountability courts;
- 23 (iv) Diversion programs other than accountability courts;
- 24 (v) Veteran sentencing option; and
- 25 (vi) Sentencing mitigation.
- 26 (d) Notify veteran arrestees and inmates about assigned veterans justice outreach
27 specialists.
- 28 (e) Verified veteran status shall be shared with the judge, prosecutor, managing public
29 defender, veteran's attorney, and specialty court coordinator.

30 SECTION 2. Chapter 13-8 of the General Laws entitled "Parole" is hereby amended by
31 adding thereto the following section:

32 **13-8-32.1. Community supervision applicability -- Veterans.**

33 (a) Within twenty-one (21) days of community supervision sentence or start date, the
34 administrator or designee, of Rhode Island probation or parole, or the RIVETS shall:

- 1 (1) Verify veteran status using VRSS or a similar service;
2 (2) Notify verified veterans of assigned veterans justice outreach specialists;
3 (3) Allow verified veterans in-person or video access to VA or county veterans service
4 coordinators;
5 (4) Assist verified veterans in applying for federal benefits, including mailing applications
6 on behalf of the supervisee;
7 (5) Submit weekly reports of verified supervisees to Rhode Island department of veterans
8 services.

9 SECTION 3. Chapter 42-56 of the General Laws entitled "Corrections Department" is
10 hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

11 **42-56-43. Administration of veteran status.**

12 (a) Within seven (7) days of intake, the director of the correctional facility, designee, or
13 RIVETS shall:

- 14 (1) Verify veteran status using VRSS or similar service;
15 (2) Assist verified veteran inmates with federal benefits and applications;
16 (3) Submit weekly reports of newly verified veteran inmates to the Rhode Island
17 department of veterans services, and relevant courts;
18 (4) Allow in-person or video visitation with VA or veteran coordinators at no cost.
19 (b) Administrators shall notify the VA in writing by mail, email, or fax between sixty-one
20 (61) and ninety (90) days of initial incarceration for felony veterans still in custody.
21 (c) Administrators shall notify the VA within seven (7) days of release from custody for
22 inmates incarcerated more than sixty (60) days.
23 (d) Verified veteran status shall be shared with the judge, prosecutor, managing public
24 defender, veteran's attorney, and specialty court coordinator.

25 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

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RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE -- VETERANS IDENTIFICATION IN THE
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- 1 This act would provide services for veterans in the criminal justice system ensuring
- 2 disclosure and connections with federal and state resources.
- 3 This act would take effect upon passage.

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