

CHAPTER 292

AN ACT concerning the development of a mobile application by the Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs and amending N.J.S.38A:21-5.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. N.J.S.38A:21-5 is amended to read as follows:

Functions, powers, duties, Department of Veterans Affairs commissioner.

38A:21-5. The commissioner, as head of the department, shall have all of the functions, powers, and duties heretofore vested in the Administrator of Veterans Affairs of the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, previously designated in N.J.S.38A:3-2, and shall have, in addition, the functions, powers, and duties vested in the commissioner by this act, N.J.S.38A:21-1 et al., or by any other law, which are as follows:

- a. Administer the work of the department;
- b. Appoint and remove officers and other personnel employed within the department, subject to the provisions of Title 11A of the New Jersey Statutes and other applicable statutes, except as herein otherwise specifically provided;
- c. Have authority to organize and maintain an administrative division and to assign to employment therein secretarial, clerical, and other assistants in the department's or the commissioner's office as the internal operations of the department may require, in accordance with Title 11A of the New Jersey Statutes;
- d. Perform, exercise, and discharge the functions, powers, and duties of the department through such divisions as may be established by this act or otherwise by law;
- e. Organize the work of the department in divisions, not inconsistent with the provisions of this act, and in bureaus and other organizational units as the commissioner may determine to be necessary for efficient and effective operation;
- f. Adopt, issue, and promulgate, in the name of the department, pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), such rules and regulations as may be necessary to implement this act or as may be authorized by law;
- g. Formulate and adopt rules and regulations for the efficient conduct of the work and general administration of the department, its officers, and its employees;
- h. Institute, or cause to be instituted, legal proceedings or processes as may be necessary to properly enforce and give effect to any of the commissioner's powers or duties;
- i. Coordinate the activities of the department, and the other divisions and agencies therein, in a manner designed to eliminate overlapping and duplicative functions;
- j. Integrate within the department, so far as practicable, all staff services of the department and of the other divisions and agencies therein;
- k. Have access to all relevant files and records of other State agencies and require any officer or employee therein to provide information as necessary to assist in performing the functions of the department, subject to any privacy laws;
- l. Maintain suitable headquarters for the department and such other quarters as the commissioner shall deem necessary to the proper functioning of the department;
- m. Encourage and facilitate the registration of each service member residing in New Jersey with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs or its successor agency. Registration shall take place, as appropriate, when the service member returns from deployment on federal active duty, or is discharged, or as soon as possible thereafter. The term "service member" shall mean members of the New Jersey National Guard and members of the United States

Armed Forces, or a Reserve component thereof, when the information on each member is made available to the department;

n. Develop and coordinate a volunteer-based program comprised of former service members to assist and mentor veterans who become involved with the criminal justice system, while criminal proceedings are pending and afterward, with accessing assistance to resolve the underlying problems that led or contributed to the veteran's involvement with the criminal justice system, including, but not limited to, offering support and guidance, securing housing, employment linkages, job training, education, transportation, disability compensation claims, discharge status, health care, and other linkages available at the local, State, and federal level that can ease the challenge of reentry into civilian life. In addition, the commissioner shall develop a registry of volunteer mentors and make the registry available pursuant to P.L.2017, c.42 (C.2C:43-23 et al.);

o. Prepare and disseminate a directory of Veterans Diversion Resource Program entities currently available within New Jersey pursuant to P.L.2017, c.42 (C.2C:43-23 et al.);

p. Create a comprehensive public webpage for Gold Star family members that includes, but is not limited to, the following information: State benefits, State and county liaisons, a list of service members from New Jersey killed in action, links to other Gold Star family organizations, and such other information and resources as the commissioner deems necessary and beneficial to a Gold Star family member. A "Gold Star family member" means the spouse, domestic partner, partner in a civil union, parent, brother, sister, child, legal guardian, or other legal custodian, whether of the whole or half blood, or by adoption, of a member of the Armed Forces of the United States or the National Guard who died while on active duty for the United States;

q. Maintain a regional network of Veteran Service Offices to assist veterans and their dependents with information and guidance in filing claims and to assist with employment, education, burial, counseling, housing, social and medical services, and other areas of concern to veterans and their families, as well as provide advice and support to veterans re-entering civilian life;

r. Perform such other functions as may be prescribed in this act or by any other law; and

s. Have the authority and endeavor to provide current information to veterans and their families on State and federal veterans' programs and benefits via a mobile application that includes, but is not limited to, information regarding veterans' legal rights, benefits, medical and insurance issues, education, housing, the transition from active to civilian life, and other support assistance and resources available to veterans and their families.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 20, 2026.