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HOUSE BILL NO. 529**AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE**(Proposed by the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations
on March 4, 2026)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Thornton)

*A BILL to amend and reenact §§ 2.2-2004.2 and 32.1-263 of the Code of Virginia, relating to Suicide Prevention Coordinator; deaths by suicide of veterans or military service members; State Registrar of Vital Records; Department of Veterans Services annual report.***Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:****1. That §§ 2.2-2004.2 and 32.1-263 of the Code of Virginia are amended and reenacted as follows:
§ 2.2-2004.2. Suicide Prevention Coordinator; position created; duties; report.**

A. There is created in the Department of Veterans Services the position of Suicide Prevention Coordinator to support and closely coordinate effective mental health care services for military service members and veterans and their families.

B. The Suicide Prevention Coordinator shall:

1. Gather data on mental health challenges commonly experienced by military service members and veterans and their families that may lead to suicide;

2. In coordination with federal, state, and local partners, gather, review, analyze, and disseminate timely federal, state, and local data on the quantity, common causes, and methods of suicide utilized among military service members, veterans, and their family members;

3. Collaborate with federal, state, and local partners to increase mental health, substance abuse, and suicide risk screenings and refer military service members and veterans and their family members to the appropriate behavioral health and medical professionals or services;

4. Identify and coordinate new behavioral health and suicide prevention opportunities and funding for those opportunities and, from such funds as may be appropriated or are otherwise available for this purpose, administer a grant program to assist local partners in implementing and coordinating suicide prevention efforts in local communities;

5. Provide suicide prevention resources, training, and support to federal, state, and local agencies; ~~and~~

6. *Compile and analyze data relating to the suicides of veterans and military service members pursuant to death certificates filed with the State Registrar of Vital Records in accordance with § 32.1-263. Such data shall be included in the annual report submitted in accordance with the provisions of § 2.2-2001;*

7. *Collaborate with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to develop programs and resources related to suicide prevention for veterans and military service members; and*

8. Perform other duties as may be required to effectively provide suicide prevention resources, training, and support to military service members, veterans, and their families.

C. The Commissioner shall include a summary of the work of the Suicide Prevention Coordinator in the annual report to the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, the Governor, and the General Assembly as required pursuant to subdivision 9 of § 2.2-2004.

§ 32.1-263. Filing death certificates; medical certification; investigation by Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

A. A death certificate, including, if known, the social security number or control number issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-342 of the deceased, shall be filed for each death that occurs in the Commonwealth. Non-electronically filed death certificates shall be filed with the registrar of any district in the Commonwealth within three days after such death and prior to final disposition or removal of the body from the Commonwealth. Electronically filed death certificates shall be filed with the State Registrar of Vital Records through the Electronic Death Registration System within three days after such death and prior to final disposition or removal of the body from the Commonwealth. Any death certificate shall be registered by such registrar if it has been completed and filed in accordance with the following requirements:

1. If the place of death is unknown, but the dead body is found in the Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in the Commonwealth and the place where the dead body is found shall be shown as the place of death. If the date of death is unknown, it shall be determined by approximation, taking into consideration all relevant information, including information provided by the immediate family regarding the date and time that the deceased was last seen alive, if the individual died in his home; and

2. When death occurs in a moving conveyance, in the United States of America and the body is first removed from the conveyance in the Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in the Commonwealth and the place where it is first removed shall be considered the place of death. When a death occurs on a moving conveyance while in international waters or air space or in a foreign country or its air space and the body is first removed from the conveyance in the Commonwealth, the death shall be registered in the Commonwealth

60 but the certificate shall show the actual place of death insofar as can be determined.

61 B. The licensed funeral director, funeral service licensee, office of the state anatomical program, or next
62 of kin as defined in § 54.1-2800 who first assumes custody of a dead body shall complete the certificate of
63 death. He shall obtain personal data of the deceased necessary to complete the certificate of death, including
64 the social security number of the deceased or control number issued to the deceased by the Department of
65 Motor Vehicles pursuant to § 46.2-342, from the best qualified person or source available and obtain the
66 medical certification from the person responsible therefor.

67 If a licensed funeral director, funeral service licensee, or representative of the office of the state
68 anatomical program completes the certificate of death, he shall file the certificate of death with the State
69 Registrar of Vital Records electronically using the Electronic Death Registration System and in accordance
70 with the requirements of subsection A. If a member of the next of kin of the deceased completes the
71 certificate of death, he shall file the certificate of death in accordance with the requirements of subsection A
72 but shall not be required to file the certificate of death electronically.

73 C. The medical certification shall be completed and filed electronically with the State Registrar of Vital
74 Records using the Electronic Death Registration System within 24 hours after death by the physician or
75 autonomous nurse practitioner in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition that resulted in death
76 except when inquiry or investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required by § 32.1-283
77 or 32.1-285.1, or by the physician or autonomous nurse practitioner who pronounces death pursuant to
78 § 54.1-2972. If the death occurred while under the care of a hospice provider, the medical certification shall
79 be completed by the decedent's health care provider and filed electronically with the State Registrar of Vital
80 Records using the Electronic Death Registration System for completion of the death certificate.

81 In the absence of such physician or autonomous nurse practitioner or with his approval, the certificate
82 may be completed and filed by the following: (i) another physician or autonomous nurse practitioner
83 employed or engaged by the same professional practice; (ii) a physician assistant supervised by such
84 physician; (iii) an advanced practice registered nurse who is not an autonomous nurse practitioner practicing
85 in accordance with the provisions of § 54.1-2957; (iv) the chief medical officer or medical director, or his
86 designee, of the institution, hospice, or nursing home in which death occurred; (v) a physician or autonomous
87 nurse practitioner specializing in the delivery of health care to hospitalized or emergency department patients
88 who is employed by or engaged by the facility where the death occurred; (vi) the physician who performed an
89 autopsy upon the decedent; (vii) an individual to whom the physician or autonomous nurse practitioner has
90 delegated authority to complete and file the certificate, if such individual has access to the medical history of
91 the case and death is due to natural causes; or (viii) a physician who is not licensed by the Board of Medicine
92 who was in charge of the patient's care for the illness or condition that resulted in death. A physician
93 described in clause (viii) who completes a certificate in accordance with this subsection shall not be required
94 to register with the Electronic Death Registration System or complete the certificate electronically.

95 As used in this subsection, "autonomous nurse practitioner" has the same meaning as provided in
96 § 54.1-2972.

97 D. When inquiry or investigation by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required by § 32.1-283
98 or 32.1-285.1, the Chief Medical Examiner shall cause an investigation of the cause of death to be made and
99 the medical certification portion of the death certificate to be completed and filed within 24 hours after being
100 notified of the death. If the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner refuses jurisdiction, the physician last
101 furnishing medical care to the deceased shall prepare and file the medical certification portion of the death
102 certificate.

103 E. If the death is a natural death and a death certificate is being prepared pursuant to § 54.1-2972 and the
104 physician, autonomous nurse practitioner, or physician assistant is uncertain about the cause of death, he shall
105 use his best medical judgment to certify a reasonable cause of death or contact the health district physician
106 director in the district where the death occurred to obtain guidance in reaching a determination as to a cause
107 of death and document the same.

108 If the cause of death cannot be determined within 24 hours after death, the medical certification shall be
109 completed as provided by regulations of the Board. The attending physician or autonomous nurse
110 practitioner, as defined in § 54.1-2972, or the Chief Medical Examiner, an Assistant Chief Medical Examiner,
111 or a medical examiner appointed pursuant to § 32.1-282 shall give the funeral director or person acting as
112 such notice of the reason for the delay, and final disposition of the body shall not be made until authorized by
113 the attending physician, autonomous nurse practitioner, the Chief Medical Examiner, an Assistant Chief
114 Medical Examiner, or a medical examiner appointed pursuant to § 32.1-282.

115 F. A physician, autonomous nurse practitioner, physician assistant, or individual delegated authority to
116 complete and file a certificate of death by a physician who, in good faith, files a certificate of death or
117 determines the cause of death shall be immune from civil liability, only for such filing and determination of
118 causes of death on such certificate, absent gross negligence or willful misconduct.

119 *G. In any case where a death certificate of a veteran or military service member is filed and lists suicide*
120 *as the manner of death, the State Registrar of Vital Records shall provide such information concerning the*
121 *suicide to the Department of Veterans Services.*