**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, SO AS TO ENACT THE “VETERANS NURSING DEGREE OPPORTUNITY ACT”; AND BY ADDING ARTICLE 3 TO CHAPTER 33, TITLE 40 SO AS TO AUTHORIZE THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF VETERAN ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE IN NURSING DEGREE PROGRAMS AND VETERAN BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN NURSING DEGREE PROGRAMS TO ENABLE MILITARY VETERANS WITH RELEVANT MILITARY TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE TO EXPEDITE THE TRANSITION FROM MILITARY LIFE TO A PROFESSIONAL CAREER IN NURSING, TO PROVIDE NECESSARY DEFINITIONS, TO REQUIRE A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BY THE COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION, STATE BOARD OF NURSING, BOARD FOR TECHNICAL AND COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS’ AFFAIRS, AND THE SOUTH CAROLINA NURSES ASSOCIATION TO IDENTIFY GAPS BETWEEN RELEVANT MILITARY EDUCATION AND TRAINING AND ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS FOR UNDERGRADUATE NURSING EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND DEGREES APPROVED BY THE STATE BOARD OF NURSING AND LICENSURE BY THE BOARD, AND TO APPROVE CURRICULUM TO ENABLE MILITARY VETERANS TO APPLY SUCH EDUCATION AND TRAINING TOWARD REQUIREMENTS FOR AN ASSOCIATE’S DEGREE IN NURSING OR A BACHELOR’S DEGREE IN NURSING AT PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING, AND LICENSURE AS A LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE OR REGISTERED NURSE, AMONG OTHER THINGS.

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act must be known and may be cited as the “Veterans Nursing Degree Opportunity Act”.

SECTION 2. Chapter 33, Title 40 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“Article 3

Veteran Nursing Degrees and Certification

Section 40‑33‑310. For purposes of this article:

(1) ‘Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education’ means the State Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education created in Section 59‑53‑10.

(2) ‘Board of Nursing’ means the State Board of Nursing created in Section 40‑33‑10.

(3) ‘Department of Veterans’ Affairs’ means the Department of Veterans’ Affairs created within the Department of Administration in Section 25‑11‑10.

(4) ‘Commission on Higher Education’ means the Commission on Higher Education created in Section 59‑103‑10.

(5) ‘South Carolina Nurses Association’ means the membership organization that represents all South Carolina registered nurses.

(6) ‘Service member’ means any person who, at the time of application for licensure to any state licensing agency, is an active duty member of the United States armed forces or any reserve component of the United States armed forces or the National Guard of any state, commonwealth, or territory of the United States or the District of Columbia, and shall also include any veteran whose active duty service concluded within the preceding two years before submitting his or her application for licensure.

Section 40‑33‑320. (A) The purpose of this article is to provide a gateway for military veterans to transition from military life to a professional career in nursing by authorizing the development and implementation of Veteran Associate of Science in Nursing degree (VASN) programs and Veteran Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree (VBSN) programs. These programs are intended to enable veteran military clinical personnel, such as medics and corpsmen, to accelerate the process at participating South Carolina public and independent colleges and institutions for obtaining associate’s degrees and bachelor’s degrees in nursing by awarding academic and clinical credit or waivers of academic and clinical credit for relevant education, experience, and skills acquired from their military service.

(B) The Commission on Higher Education, State Board of Nursing, Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education, South Carolina Nurses Association, and Department of Veterans’ Affairs are directed to collaborate in a study to identify gaps between relevant military education and training and the academic and training requirements for undergraduate nursing education programs and degrees approved by the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, and accepted by the State Board of Nursing and licensure by the board, and to make recommendations to enable participating colleges and institutions to apply such education and training requirements toward requirements for an associate’s degree in nursing or a bachelor’s degree in nursing and licensure as a licensed practical nurse or registered nurse. Within six months after the effective date of this act, the Commission on Higher Education and Board for Technical and Comprehensive Education shall share the findings of the group with the colleges and institutions having nursing programs. The collaborating entities will also create a plan to promote and market these opportunities available for veterans in order to aid:

(1) educational institutions in designing and obtaining funding through federal, state, or private grants for gap‑bridging Veteran Associate of Science in Nursing degrees or Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree programs; and

(2) service members in identifying prospective requirements for licensure as a licensed practical nurse or registered nurse through either, a Veteran Associate of Science in Nursing degree or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree program.”

SECTION 3. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

‑‑‑‑XX‑‑‑‑