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NATIONAL INTEREST

## Veterans Blast Georgia Bill to Put PTSD Diagnosis on Driver's Licenses By Joshua Rhett Miller

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problem, much like poor eyesight.

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Veterans groups are blasting Georgia lawmakers for passing legislation that would allow a diagnosis of

from PTSD, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

post-traumatic stress disorder to appear on driver's licenses. The legislation, which awaits Gov. Sonny Purdue's signature, would permit servicemembers and

veterans to request a PTSD denotation, which would appear on their driver's licenses as a specific health

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can occur after a traumatic event, including sexual assault, physical assault and military combat. Symptoms include vivid flashbacks to the traumatic event, depression and substance abuse, among others. Up to 20 percent of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars suffer

The bill would require a sworn statement from a physician verifying a diagnosis of PTSD and a waiver of liability for the release of the driver's medical information.

State Sen. Ron Ramsey, who co-sponsored the bill, says he sees no downside to the measure. In a statement to FoxNews.com, Ramsey, a Democrat, said the "completely voluntary" legislation may protect law enforcement officers and veterans from potentially dangerous situations. Sponsored Links "For example if a veteran suffering from PTSD was pulled over for a

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circumstances could inform an officer that the situation should be handled cautiously," the statement read. "If a veteran does not feel it is necessary to designate this on their license, then they do not have to. Again, it is entirely voluntary." The bill's co-sponsor, State Sen. John Douglas, a Republican is an Army veteran who has also said the bill might encourage safer

encounters between people with PTSD and law enforcement officials.

But veterans organizations contacted by FoxNews.com described the

simple traffic violation, a designation on the license explaining the

legislation as a "terrible idea." Ryan Gallucci, a spokesman for AMVETS, a national organization representing 200,000 veterans, said

the legislation puts veterans at risk of discrimination, even though the PTSD denotation would be voluntary. He pointed out that driver's licenses are used for identification purposes that go far beyond encounters

with police officers. "Bar owners, liquor store owners could easily refuse service if they saw in black and white that a

customer suffered from a mental illness -- even if it's service related," Gallucci wrote in an e-mail to

FoxNews.com. "We already see enough negatives in how the public perceives today's veterans when it comes to mental health." And he noted that all citizens -- veterans or otherwise -- have the opportunity to explain any medical condition to a judge when fighting a ticket.

"The police have an obligation to maintain order -- it doesn't matter why someone's breaking the law," Gallucci wrote. "Even with traffic tickets, you are entitled to your day in court. What AMVETS prefers to

see are the veterans' courts we've seen spring up around the country designated to handle veterans' cases within the unique context of their experiences." Marvin Myers, president of the Georgia Vietnam Veterans Alliance Inc., said he could think of no situation where a veteran would want to disclose his or her medical condition, including traffic stops.

"I don't understand the logic behind it whatsoever," he told FoxNews.com. "Why someone would voluntarily put this out there, I'm not sure."

He said he, too, was concerned of potential discrimination against veterans with PTSD. "What happens if Jerry Smith has PTSD on his driver's license and he goes into a gun store? The clerk is

Myers acknowledged that the PTSD designation on a license could garner sympathy from law

going to say, 'Oh no, I'm not selling you that gun," Myers said. "I just think you open up Pandora's box. You're disclosing too much of yourself."

enforcement officials in some instances, but he said other members of his organization agreed that the

The Department of Veterans Affairs declined to comment when asked if it endorsed the legislation. Brian Zeringue, a spokesman for Georgia's Department of Veterans Service, said the agency had no objection to the law as long as the decision to include personal medical information on a driver's license is "left entirely up to" the veteran.

the bill. A final decision will be made by June 8, he said. Gordy Wright, a spokesman for Georgia State Patrol, said the PTSD designation, if signed into law,

Chris Schrimpf, a spokesman for Purdue, said the Republican governor has not decided whether to sign

"There would be an explanation to account for it," he said. "It can be a positive step for a positive outcome."

would give officers a visible alert to "be on guard" and more aware of potentially threatening actions.

Wright insisted that drivers with the PTSD designation would not receive leniency.

"More or less, it's so the officer is aware of the condition and be alert for any sudden actions or movements," he said. "Never say never, but we would expect Georgia state troopers to conduct the

traffic stop in a professional manner." Recommend 1,225 Print Email Share Comments (221) - Text Size +

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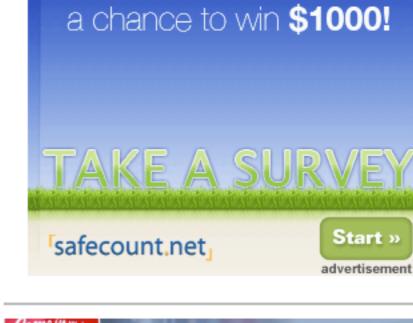
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