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## HOUSE BILL NO. 1474

## AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE

(Proposed by the House Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions  
on January 26, 2006)

(Patron Prior to Substitute—Delegate Carrico)

*A BILL to create an awareness program relating to viral hepatitis.*

Whereas, hepatitis C, a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus, which is a blood-borne pathogen, may be contracted through exposure to blood during combat and during combat-related emergency medical treatment, blood transfusions, organ and tissue transplants prior to 1992, clotting factors manufactured prior to 1987, long-term kidney dialysis, and the use of injected drugs; and

Whereas, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs has estimated that veterans have a more than three times higher rate for infection with hepatitis C than the general population; and Vietnam veterans were found to have an even higher rate of infection with hepatitis C than other populations of veterans; and

Whereas, up to 85% of those infected with hepatitis C may develop a chronic infection; and

Whereas, a 1999 study conducted by the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) that involved 26,000 veterans indicated that up to 10% of all veterans in the VHA system tested positive for hepatitis C; and

Whereas, Virginia is home to a number of military bases and has a large population of veterans; now, therefore,

**Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:**

**1. §1. That the Department of Veterans Services (DVS), in consultation with the Department of Health, shall establish and administer a viral hepatitis awareness program for the purpose of distributing information to Virginians who are at risk for exposure to viral hepatitis, with emphasis on the risks to Virginia's veterans of viral hepatitis C (HCV) exposure and infection.**

*A. The information distributed pursuant to the awareness program shall include, but need not be limited to:*

*1. The risk factors for infection with viral hepatitis, particularly HCV among veterans groups;*

*2. The prevention, etiology, and effects of infection with viral hepatitis, including HCV among veterans groups;*

*3. The epidemiological profile of viral hepatitis in Virginia, with specific data on HCV among veterans, in so far as possible;*

*4. The potential for infection with HCV to become a chronic infection without obvious symptoms for many years before the signs of liver disease appear;*

*5. The difficulty in linking current symptoms with an infection that may have been contracted years or even decades earlier because of the unusually long latency period of HCV;*

*6. The advantages of testing of Virginians at risk for exposure to HCV to determine whether treatment is needed and would be beneficial;*

*7. The advantages to Virginians at risk of exposure to viral hepatitis being vaccinated for hepatitis A and B; and*

*8. Referral and treatment options, and opportunities for Virginians at risk of infection with viral hepatitis, particularly HCV, to obtain medical consultation for screening and treatment purposes.*

*B. For the purposes of the viral hepatitis awareness program, the DVS shall utilize insofar as possible, information available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in its publications and on its website as well as data available through Virginia's existing disease surveillance and investigation program.*

*C. The information developed for the hepatitis awareness program shall be disseminated to veterans and others by electronic means, as appropriate, and through other available media. The information shall be disseminated through local health departments and veterans' organizations in Virginia as well as at military bases and veterans hospitals in cooperation with the relevant federal agencies.*