



April 5, 2023

The Honorable Terrance Freeman  
President, Jacksonville City Council, Duval County  
117 W. Duval St #425  
Jacksonville, FL 32202

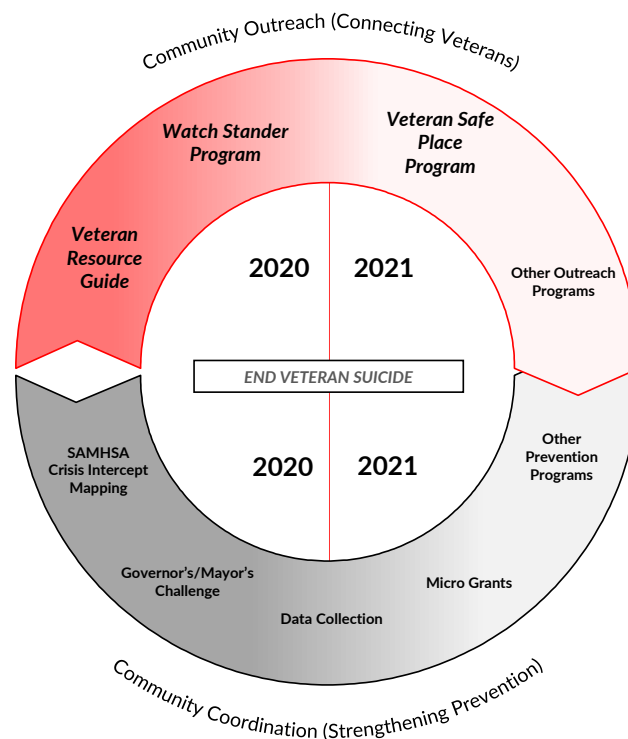
Subject: Executive Summary of 2022 Northeast Florida Fire Watch Council Annual Report

Dear President Freeman;

As per Section 6(b) of the Interlocal Agreement Regarding Veteran Suicide Prevention between Baker County, Clay County, Nassau County, St. Johns County, and the City of Jacksonville (together, the "Counties"), please accept this written report from the Northeast Florida Fire Watch Council (the "Council") regarding progress made toward veteran suicide prevention in Northeast Florida.

Background. The Council is a multi-jurisdictional government entity formed in October 2019 to lead regional efforts to reduce veteran suicide. The Counties are home to 1,500,000 residents and 160,000 military veterans. In 2019, the 5 counties lost 78 veterans to suicide, which was the highest annual count recorded since 2001. The Council first convened in December 2019. In February 2020, it hosted public meetings to gather feedback on its Program Plan. In March 2020, it launched that plan.

Program Plan Implementation. Based on the CDC's Suicide Prevention Logic Model, the Council implemented two categories of programs in 2020 and 2021 – *Community Coordination* and *Community Outreach*.



The *Community Coordination* programs focus on working with community stakeholders to strengthen crisis care services available to our veterans.

- The **Crisis Intercept Mapping** initiative is a study facilitated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and coordinated by the Council to help communities strengthen the delivery of their evidence-based veteran suicide prevention practices. This study was conducted for the entire region in 2020, in Baker in 2021, and in Clay in 2022. Nassau is next.
- The Council represents the 5 counties on the Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs ("FDVA") **Governor's Challenge** team to end veteran suicide.
- In August 2021, the Council obtained **Veteran Suicide Data** for the Counties and engaged local data analytics firm NLP Logix to analyze the data and build a predictive model. This data established a 2019 baseline to measure the success of our programs and is currently being used to identify high risk areas and focus prevention programming. *The Council's data is the most timely and detailed regional data available anywhere in the country.*
- In order to close gaps identified by the Crisis Intercept Mapping and our veteran suicide data, the Council launched a **Micro Grant** program in September 2021. In November 2021, the Council awarded \$98,500 to 10 different veteran serving organizations across the 5 counties. The process was overseen by COJ's Office of Grants and Contracts Compliance. This program is being repeated in the current fiscal year for a total grant pool of \$50,000.

The *Community Outreach* programs focus on increasing awareness of veteran suicide, engaging the community and connecting veterans to the resources available to them.

- In early 2020, the Council developed and launched a comprehensive digital **Veteran Resource Guide** in April 2020. It is available at [www.thefirewatch.org](http://www.thefirewatch.org) and contains over 500 low-cost or no-cost resources available to veterans in the Counties.
- Our key veteran suicide prevention innovation is the **Watch Stander Program**. Modeled after CPR, it was launched in May 2020 and is an upstream, early intervention network of community bystanders (volunteers) trained to identify risk factors of veterans in crisis and to direct them to the resources they need, including the Veteran Crisis Line, 211 or our Veteran Resources Guide.

Because of local and state funding, the program is available free on our website. Training takes just 30 to 45 minutes. The more opportunities our community can provide to steer a veteran off the course toward suicide, the lower we can drive the rate of veteran suicide in our community. Our Watch Stander program is the first of its kind in the country.

Progress Toward Ending Veteran Suicide. The Council's primary objective is to reduce veteran suicides in the Counties by 25% over 3 years when compared against baseline 2019 veteran suicide data. The Council now has two years of applicable veteran suicide data to compare against the 2019 baseline. In 2020, with the first year of the Watch Stander network in place, the region recorded 45 veteran suicides, a 42.3% reduction from baseline. In 2021, there were 36 veteran suicides in Northeast Florida. This is a 53.8% reduction from baseline. For context, across all of Florida, the reduction over this period was 8%. Northeast Florida's progress is remarkable, and it is the result of the strong commitment of the community, of our citizens, and of local leaders to directly address this crisis and to honor our nation's heroes.



Attachment A explains the veteran suicide data in more detail. Until we receive 3 years of data, the Council tracks the number of early intervention bystanders (Watch Standers) on a weekly basis to measure success. We exceeded our goal of 3,000 in 2022. The next objective is 5,000 in 2023. A Watch Stander counter, updated weekly, is available at [www.thefirewatch.org](http://www.thefirewatch.org).

**Funding and Budget.** Below is a list of annual contributions from the Counties to date. Since inception, the Council has received contributions from the Counties averaging 86 cents per veteran per year. Considering the reductions in veteran suicides over 2019 baseline numbers, this represents a strong ROI.

County	FY20			FY21			FY22			FY23			4-Year		
	Contributed	%	Per	Contributed	%	Per	Contributed	%	Per	Contributed	%	Per	Average	%	Per
City of Jacksonville	\$ 70,000	65%	\$ 0.64	\$ 85,000	61%	\$ 0.78	100,000	59%	\$ 0.91	150,000	70%	\$ 1.37	101,250	64%	\$ 0.92
Baker County	\$ 10,000	9%	\$ 3.70	\$ 10,000	7%	\$ 3.70	10,000	6%	\$ 3.70	7,500	3%	\$ 2.77	9,375	6%	\$ 3.47
Clay County	\$ 7,500	7%	\$ 0.22	\$ 15,000	11%	\$ 0.43	25,000	15%	\$ 0.72	25,000	12%	\$ 0.72	18,125	11%	\$ 0.52
Nassau County	\$ 5,000	5%	\$ 0.45	\$ 5,000	4%	\$ 0.45	5,000	3%	\$ 0.45	5,000	2%	\$ 0.45	5,000	3%	\$ 0.45
St Johns County	\$ 15,000	14%	\$ 0.57	\$ 25,000	18%	\$ 0.95	30,000	18%	\$ 1.14	27,500	13%	\$ 1.04	24,375	15%	\$ 0.93
Total	\$ 107,500		\$ 0.58	\$ 140,000		\$ 0.76	170,000		\$ 0.92	215,000		\$ 1.17	158,125		\$ 0.86

The Council's 2022 Statement of Financial Activity is included as Attachment B. It executed its 2022 plan within budget. Note that the Council has no employees. Instead, it contracts with service providers to deliver its programs. Over 90% of the Council's expenditures each year are directly spent on executing programs.

**Statewide Expansion and The Fire Watch Project, Inc.** To support expansion of the Watch Stander program outside of the Counties, private donors funded the creation of a non-profit entity called The Fire Watch Project, Inc., (the "501(c)(3)") in late 2020. The Council approved of the 501(c)(3)'s creation. In October 2021, the Fire Watch Council contracted with the 501(c)(3) to deliver administrative services, to include a Program Administrator and an assigned Executive Director. In May 2022, FDVA awarded the 501(c)(3) a grant to launch its programs statewide, and in October 2022, it contracted with the 501(c)(3) to create a veteran suicide prevention training program for all FDVA Veteran Claims Examiners (VCEs) and County Veteran Service Officers (CVSOs). That program, called Overwatch, is being implemented now. The Counties have successfully incubated the Council's veterans suicide prevention programming and started its expansion statewide.

**Administrator Shift.** In February 2022, the Counties shifted Administrative and Financial support responsibility for the Council from the City of Jacksonville to St. Johns County. An amendment to the 2019 Interlocal Agreement was approved by each County commission prior to the shift. This change is working effectively.

**Summary.** Thank you for your leadership in launching the Council. We hope you will agree that our plan is working expeditiously to accomplish the Counties' mission to end veteran suicide in Northeast Florida. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Appreciatively,

Michael P. Fleming, Brigadier General (ret)  
Chairman, Northeast Florida Fire Watch Council

Cc: Derek Collins, Executive Director (as assigned), Northeast Florida Fire Watch Council