

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 882

To require a pilot program on the facilitation of the transition of members of the Armed Forces to receipt of veterans health care benefits upon completion of military service, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 14, 2007

Mr. MENENDEZ (for himself, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. CASEY, Mr. DURBIN, and Mr. KERRY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require a pilot program on the facilitation of the transition of members of the Armed Forces to receipt of veterans health care benefits upon completion of military service, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. PILOT PROGRAM ON FACILITATION OF TRANSI-**
4 **TION OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES**
5 **TO RECEIPT OF VETERANS HEALTH CARE**
6 **BENEFITS AFTER COMPLETION OF MILITARY**
7 **SERVICE.**

8 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
2 Affairs shall carry out a pilot program to assess the
3 feasibility and advisability of utilizing eligible enti-
4 ties to assist members of the Armed Forces, particu-
5 larly members described in paragraph (2), in apply-
6 ing for and receiving health care benefits and serv-
7 ices from the Department of Veterans Affairs and
8 otherwise after completion of military service in
9 order to ensure that such members receive a con-
10 tinuity of care and assistance in and after the tran-
11 sition from military service to civilian life.

12 (2) TARGET POPULATIONS.—The pilot program
13 shall focus on providing assistance to all members of
14 the Armed Forces, with particular emphasis on the
15 following members:

16 (A) Members with serious wounds or inju-
17 ries.

18 (B) Members with mental disorders.

19 (C) Women members.

20 (D) Members of the National Guard and
21 the Reserves.

22 (3) VETERAN NAVIGATOR.—Eligible entities
23 shall provide assistance under the pilot program
24 through qualified individuals who provide such as-
25 sistance on an individualized basis to members of

1 the Armed Forces described in paragraph (1) as
2 they transition from military service to civilian life
3 and during the commencement of their receipt of
4 health care benefits and services from the Depart-
5 ment of Veterans Affairs and otherwise. An indi-
6 vidual providing such assistance may be referred to
7 as a “veteran navigator”.

8 (4) CONSULTATION.—The Secretary of Vet-
9 erans Affairs shall carry out the pilot program in
10 consultation with the Secretary of Defense.

11 (b) DURATION OF PROGRAM.—The pilot program
12 shall be carried out during the five-year period beginning
13 on the date of the enactment of this Act.

14 (c) PROGRAM LOCATIONS.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The pilot program shall be
16 carried out at locations selected by the Secretary of
17 Veterans Affairs for purposes of the pilot program.
18 Of the locations so selected—

19 (A) at least one shall be in the vicinity of
20 a military medical treatment facility (MTF)
21 that treats members of the Armed Forces who
22 are seriously wounded or injured in Afghanistan
23 or Iraq;

1 (B) at least one shall be in the vicinity of
2 a Department of Veterans Affairs medical cen-
3 ter located in a rural area; and

4 (C) at least one shall be in the vicinity of
5 a Department of Veterans Affairs medical cen-
6 ter located in an urban area.

7 (2) ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—Any locations for
8 the pilot program that are in addition to the loca-
9 tions selected under paragraph (1) shall be selected
10 by the Secretary in consultation with the grant ap-
11 plication evaluation panel appointed under sub-
12 section (f)(3).

13 (d) GRANTS.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
15 Affairs shall carry out the pilot program through the
16 award of grants to eligible entities for the provision
17 of assistance to members of the Armed Forces as de-
18 scribed in subsection (a).

19 (2) DURATION.—The duration of any grant
20 awarded under the pilot program may not exceed
21 three years. However, any such grant may be re-
22 newed for a period not to exceed one year.

23 (e) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—For purposes of this sub-
24 section, an eligible entity is any entity or organization
25 that—

1 (1) is independent of the Department of Vet-
2 erans Affairs and the Department of Defense; and

3 (2) has or can acquire the capacity, including
4 appropriate personnel, to provide assistance under
5 the pilot program as described in subsection (a).

6 (f) SELECTION OF GRANT RECIPIENTS.—

7 (1) APPLICATION.—An eligible entity seeking a
8 grant under the pilot program shall submit to the
9 Secretary of Veterans Affairs an application therefor
10 in such form and in such manner as the Secretary
11 considers appropriate.

12 (2) ELEMENTS.—Each application submitted
13 under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

14 (A) A description of the population of
15 members of the Armed Forces to be provided
16 assistance.

17 (B) A description of the outreach to be
18 conducted by the eligible entity concerned to no-
19 tify members of the Armed Forces of the avail-
20 ability of such assistance.

21 (C) If the population of veterans described
22 in subparagraph (A) consists of members of the
23 Armed Forces described in subsection (a)(2),
24 the particular actions to be taken to provide

1 such assistance to such members of the Armed
2 Forces.

3 (3) EVALUATION.—

4 (A) IN GENERAL.—Each application sub-
5 mitted under paragraph (1) shall be evaluated
6 by a panel appointed by the Secretary for pur-
7 poses of the pilot program.

8 (B) MEMBERSHIP OF PANEL.—Members of
9 the panel shall be appointed from among indi-
10 viduals as follows:

11 (i) Officers and employees of the De-
12 partment of Veterans Affairs.

13 (ii) With the approval of the Secretary
14 of Defense, officers and employees of the
15 Department of Defense.

16 (iii) Representatives of veterans serv-
17 ice organizations.

18 (iv) Representatives of organizations
19 that provide services to members of the
20 Armed Forces.

21 (C) RECOMMENDATION.—Upon completion
22 of the evaluation of an application under this
23 subsection, the panel shall recommend to the
24 Secretary whether or not to approve the appli-
25 cation.

1 (D) RECUSAL.—No member of the panel
2 may evaluate an application that is submitted
3 by an entity with which such member is affili-
4 ated.

5 (4) APPROVAL.—The Secretary shall approve or
6 disapprove each application submitted under para-
7 graph (1). In determining whether to approve or dis-
8 approve an application, the Secretary shall take into
9 account the recommendation on such application by
10 the panel appointed by the Secretary under para-
11 graph (3).

12 (g) USE OF GRANT FUNDS.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—Each eligible entity receiving
14 a grant under this section shall use the grant to re-
15 cruit, assign, train, and employ individuals to pro-
16 vide assistance on an individualized basis to mem-
17 bers of the Armed Forces, particularly members de-
18 scribed in subsection (a)(2), as they transition from
19 military service to civilian life and during the com-
20 mencement of their receipt of health care benefits
21 and services from the Department of Veterans Af-
22 fairs and otherwise.

23 (2) QUALIFICATIONS.—Any organization pro-
24 viding assistance under the pilot program shall em-
25 ploy individuals who collectively—

1 (A) have an understanding of the unique
2 health care needs of members of the Armed
3 Forces as they transition from military service
4 to civilian life;

5 (B) have an understanding of the military
6 medical treatment system of the Department of
7 Defense; and

8 (C) have an understanding of eligibility for
9 benefits and services, mechanisms for enroll-
10 ment or participation, and receipt of benefits
11 and services in and through various systems
12 and programs of health care benefits and serv-
13 ices for veterans, including—

14 (i) the health care system of the De-
15 partment of Veterans Affairs; and

16 (ii) other health care systems and pro-
17 grams, including health care systems and
18 programs of other departments and agen-
19 cies of the Federal Government, State and
20 local governments, and other public and
21 private entities.

22 (3) SCOPE OF ASSISTANCE.—In providing as-
23 sistance to a member of the Armed Forces under the
24 pilot program, an individual shall—

1 (A) assist the member in identifying the
2 unique health care needs of the member (in-
3 cluding mental health care);

4 (B) assist the member in enrolling in the
5 health care system of the Department of Vet-
6 erans Affairs after separation from military
7 service;

8 (C) assist the member in identifying and
9 applying for any other health care benefits or
10 services to which the member may be entitled
11 after military service; and

12 (D) assist the member in obtaining the
13 timely commencement of health care benefits
14 and services from the Department of Veterans
15 Affairs, and the timely commencement of other
16 veterans health care benefits and services, so
17 that the member receives a continuity of health
18 care and assistance in and after the transition
19 from military service to civilian life.

20 (4) COORDINATION.—In providing assistance to
21 members of the Armed Forces under the pilot pro-
22 grams, individuals providing such assistance shall
23 coordinate closely with appropriate personnel of the
24 Department of Defense and the Department of Vet-
25 erans Affairs in order to—

1 (A) develop relationships (including infor-
2 mation sharing) that enhance the effectiveness
3 of such assistance;

4 (B) eliminate overlap or duplication of ef-
5 fort; and

6 (C) otherwise facilitate a continuity of care
7 and assistance for such members in and after
8 the transition from military service to civilian
9 life.

10 (5) TRAINING.—An eligible entity awarded a
11 grant under the pilot program may use grant funds
12 for the provision of training to individuals who pro-
13 vide assistance under the pilot program on matters
14 covered by the pilot program.

15 (6) REPORTS.—Each eligible entity awarded a
16 grant under the pilot program shall submit to the
17 Secretary, with such frequency as the Secretary shall
18 specify, reports on the activities undertaken under
19 the pilot program. Each report of an eligible entity
20 shall include—

21 (A) a description of the activities under-
22 taken by such eligible entity during the period
23 covered by such report; and

24 (B) an assessment of the effectiveness of
25 such activities in ensuring that members of the

1 Armed Forces receive a continuity of care and
2 assistance in and after the transition from mili-
3 tary service to civilian life.

4 (h) DUPLICATION OF SERVICES.—The Secretary may
5 not award a grant under subsection (d) to an eligible enti-
6 ty that is receiving federal funds for activities described
7 in paragraphs (1) and (3) of subsection (g) on the date
8 on which the eligible entity submits an application sub-
9 section (f)(1) unless the Secretary determines that the eli-
10 gible entity will use amounts received under the grant to
11 expand services or provide new services to individuals who
12 would not otherwise be served.

13 (i) REPORT ON PROGRAM.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than six months
15 after the completion of the pilot program, the Sec-
16 retary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress
17 report on the pilot program.

18 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report shall include the
19 following:

20 (A) A description of the activities under-
21 taken under the pilot program.

22 (B) An assessment of the effectiveness of
23 such activities in ensuring that members of the
24 Armed Forces receive a continuity of care and

1 assistance in and after the transition from mili-
2 tary service to civilian life.

3 (C) Such recommendations for legislative
4 or administrative action, including action to ex-
5 tend, expand, or make permanent the pilot pro-
6 gram, as the Secretary considers appropriate in
7 light of the pilot program.

8 (j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be
10 appropriated for the Department of Veterans Affairs
11 to carry out this section, amounts as follows:

12 (A) For fiscal year 2008, \$2,000,000.

13 (B) For fiscal year 2009, \$5,000,000.

14 (C) For fiscal year 2010, \$8,000,000.

15 (D) For fiscal year 2011, \$6,500,000.

16 (E) For fiscal year 2012, \$3,500,000.

17 (2) AVAILABILITY.—Any amount authorized to
18 be appropriated by paragraph (1) shall remain avail-
19 able for obligation through the end of fiscal year
20 2012.

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