

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 902

To provide support and assistance for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve who are undergoing deployment, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 15, 2007

Mr. HARKIN (for himself, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. KERRY, Mr. LAUTENBERG, Mr. ROCKEFELLER, Ms. LANDRIEU, and Ms. CANTWELL) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To provide support and assistance for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve who are undergoing deployment, 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. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Coming Together for
5 National Guard and Reserve Families Act of 2007”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress makes the following findings:

8 (1) More than 700,000 children have had a
9 parent deployed overseas as a member of the Armed

1 Forces since September 11, 2001, and more than
2 such 2,700 children have had a parent killed in Iraq
3 or Afghanistan.

4 (2) Forty-one percent of the members of the
5 National Guard and Reserve who have been deployed
6 overseas report mental health symptoms within three
7 to six months of returning home from deployment,
8 compared with 32 percent of the members of the
9 regular military who have been so deployed. Fifteen
10 percent of the members of the National Guard and
11 Reserve have been identified as at risk for post traumatic
12 stress disorder (PTSD), compared with 9 per-
13 cent of the members of the regular military. Re-
14 search suggests that increased stress in the family
15 can trigger symptoms of post traumatic stress dis-
16 order.

17 (3) Military families face significant challenges
18 throughout the deployment cycle of members of the
19 Armed Forces. Families of members of the National
20 Guard and Reserve are particularly vulnerable be-
21 cause of their distance from military bases and their
22 lack of access to the services upon which military
23 families typically draw. In addition, many families of
24 members of the National Guard and Reserve are
25 currently experiencing multiple extended deploy-

1 ments, and do not have the necessary support avail-
2 able to them.

3 (4) Uncertainty and separation can create high
4 levels of stress for parents, spouses, and children.
5 Stress can put children at greater risk for behavioral
6 problems, academic difficulties, anxiety, and depres-
7 sion. Family separations many times result in mar-
8 ital problems, financial difficulties, and stress on
9 family relationships.

10 (5) Research suggests that military families
11 who receive community and social support while
12 members of the National Guard and Reserve are un-
13 dergoing deployment have the most positive out-
14 comes. Supporting families and children affected by
15 deployment can ease transitional stress, help mem-
16 bers of the National Guard and Reserve and their
17 families cope during and after deployment, prevent
18 mental health problems, and assist in a smooth tran-
19 sition of members of the National Guard and Re-
20 serve back to civilian life.

21 **SEC. 3. FAMILY SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF MEMBERS OF**
22 **THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE UN-**
23 **DERGOING DEPLOYMENT.**

24 (a) FAMILY SUPPORT.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
2 shall enhance and improve current programs of the
3 Department of Defense to provide family support for
4 families of members of the National Guard and Re-
5 serve in order to improve the assistance available for
6 families of members of the National Guard and Re-
7 serve who are deployed throughout their deployment
8 cycle.

9 (2) SPECIFIC ENHANCEMENTS.—In enhancing
10 and improving programs under paragraph (1), the
11 Secretary shall enhance and improve the availability
12 of the following:

13 (A) Support staff to assist families of the
14 members of the National Guard and Reserve
15 who are deployed throughout their deployment
16 cycle, including staff to assist such families
17 in—

18 (i) preparing and updating family care
19 plans; and

20 (ii) securing information on health
21 care benefits and services and on other
22 community resources.

23 (B) Support staff to provide referrals for
24 such families for—

25 (i) crisis services; and

1 (ii) marriage counseling and family
2 counseling.

3 (b) POST-DEPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR SPOUSES
4 AND PARENTS OF RETURNING MEMBERS.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
6 shall provide spouses and parents of members of the
7 National Guard and Reserve who are returning from
8 deployment assistance in—

9 (A) understanding issues that arise in the
10 readjustment of such members to civilian life;

11 (B) identifying signs and symptoms of
12 mental health issues; and

13 (C) encouraging such members and their
14 families in seeking assistance for such issues.

15 (2) INFORMATION ON AVAILABLE RE-
16 SOURCES.—In providing assistance under paragraph
17 (1), the Secretary shall provide information on local
18 resources for mental health services, family coun-
19 seling services, or other appropriate services, includ-
20 ing services available from both military providers of
21 such services and community-base providers of such
22 services.

23 (3) TIMING.—The Secretary shall provide re-
24 sources under paragraph (1) with respect to a mem-
25 ber of the National Guard or Reserve returning from

1 deployment approximately six months after the date
 2 of the return of such member from deployment.

3 (c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
 4 hereby authorized to be appropriated for the Department
 5 of Defense for fiscal year 2008, \$4,000,000 to carry out
 6 this section.

7 **SEC. 4. PILOT PROGRAM ON FAMILY-TO-FAMILY SUPPORT**
 8 **FOR FAMILIES OF MEMBERS OF THE NA-**
 9 **TIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE UNDERGOING**
 10 **DEPLOYMENT.**

11 (a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
 13 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
 14 and Human Services, carry out a pilot program to—

15 (A) assess the effectiveness of family-to-
 16 family support programs in—

17 (i) the early identification and preven-
 18 tion of family problems for families of
 19 members of the National Guard and Re-
 20 serve who are deployed;

21 (ii) the provision of peer support for
 22 such families;

23 (iii) reducing adverse outcomes for
 24 children of such families, including poor
 25 academic performance, behavioral prob-

1 lems, and the adverse consequence of
2 stress and anxiety; and

3 (iv) improving family readiness and
4 post-deployment transition for such fami-
5 lies; and

6 (B) assess the feasibility and advisability
7 of utilizing spouses of members of the Armed
8 Forces to act as counselors for spouses and
9 families of members of the National Guard and
10 Reserve who are deployed in order to assist
11 such spouses and families in coping with the de-
12 ployment of such members throughout their de-
13 ployment cycle.

14 (2) CONSTRUCTION WITH OTHER ASSIST-
15 ANCE.—The pilot program shall be in addition to
16 any assistance programs carried out by the Sec-
17 retary of Defense.

18 (b) COUNSELING DUTIES.—The duties of spouses
19 who act as counselors under the pilot program shall in-
20 clude—

21 (1) the provision of assistance to spouses and
22 families of members of the National Guard and Re-
23 serve who are deployed with respect to family readi-
24 ness, health care, and crisis referral; and

1 (2) the provision of outreach to such spouses
2 and families on mental health matters such as mar-
3 riage and family counseling.

4 (c) TRAINING IN COUNSELING.—In carrying out the
5 pilot program, the Secretary shall provide appropriate
6 training to spouses who act as counselors under the pilot
7 program, including training on the matters set forth in
8 clauses (i) through (iv) of subsection (a)(1)(A).

9 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
10 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense
11 shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program.
12 The report shall include—

13 (1) a description of the activities under the pilot
14 program;

15 (2) an assessment of the effectiveness of family-
16 to-family support programs in achieving the results
17 set forth in subsection (a)(1)(A);

18 (3) an assessment of the feasibility and advis-
19 ability of utilizing spouses of members of the Armed
20 Forces to act as counselors as described in sub-
21 section (a)(1)(B); and

22 (4) such other matters as the Secretary con-
23 siders appropriate in light of the pilot program.

24 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
25 hereby authorized to be appropriated for the Department

1 of Defense for fiscal year 2008, \$1,000,000 to carry out
2 this section.

3 **SEC. 5. SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, INFANTS, AND**
4 **TODDLERS OF MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL**
5 **GUARD AND RESERVE UNDERGOING DEPLOY-**
6 **MENT.**

7 (a) ENHANCEMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR
8 CHILDREN.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
10 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
11 and Human Services, enter into a contract or other
12 agreement with a private sector entity having exper-
13 tise in the health and well-being of families and chil-
14 dren in order to enhance and develop support serv-
15 ices for children of members of the National Guard
16 and Reserve who are deployed.

17 (2) SUPPORT SERVICES.—In enhancing and de-
18 veloping support services pursuant to paragraph (1),
19 the entity referred to in that paragraph shall—

20 (A) develop materials for parents and
21 other caretakers of children of members of the
22 National Guard and Reserve who are deployed
23 to assist such parents and caretakers in re-
24 sponding to the adverse implications of such de-
25 ployment (and the death or injury of such mem-

1 bers during such deployment) for such children,
2 including the role such parents and caretakers
3 can play in addressing and mitigating such im-
4 plications;

5 (B) develop programs and activities to in-
6 crease awareness throughout the military and
7 civilian communities of the adverse implications
8 of such deployment (and the death or injury of
9 such members during such deployment) for
10 such children and their families and to increase
11 collaboration within such communities to ad-
12 dress and mitigate such implications;

13 (C) develop training for early child care
14 and education, mental health, health care, and
15 family support professionals to enhance the
16 awareness of such professionals of their role in
17 assisting families in addressing and mitigating
18 the adverse implications of such deployment
19 (and the death or injury of such members dur-
20 ing such deployment) for such children; and

21 (D) conduct research on best practices for
22 building psychological and emotional resiliency
23 in such children in coping with the deployment
24 of such members.

1 (b) ENHANCEMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR IN-
2 FANTS AND TODDLERS.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
4 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
5 and Human Services, enter into a contract or other
6 agreement with a private sector entity having exper-
7 tise in the health and well-being of infants and tod-
8 dlers in order to enhance and develop support serv-
9 ices to address the special needs of infants and tod-
10 dlers of members of the National Guard and Reserve
11 who are deployed.

12 (2) SUPPORT SERVICES.—In enhancing and de-
13 veloping support services pursuant to paragraph (1),
14 the entity referred to in that paragraph shall—

15 (A) develop materials for parents and
16 other caretakers of infants and toddlers of
17 members of the National Guard and Reserve
18 who are deployed to assist such parents and
19 caretakers in responding to the adverse implica-
20 tions of such deployment (and the death or in-
21 jury of such members during such deployment)
22 for such infants and toddlers, including the role
23 such parents and caretakers can play in ad-
24 dressing and mitigating such implications;

1 (B) develop programs and activities to in-
2 crease awareness throughout the military and
3 civilian communities of the adverse implications
4 of such deployment (and the death or injury of
5 such members during such deployment) for
6 such infants and toddlers and their families and
7 to increase collaboration within such commu-
8 nities to address and mitigate such implica-
9 tions;

10 (C) develop training for education, mental
11 health, health care, and family support profes-
12 sionals to enhance the awareness of such pro-
13 fessionals of their role in assisting families in
14 addressing and mitigating the adverse implica-
15 tions of such deployment (and the death or in-
16 jury of such members during such deployment)
17 for such infants and toddlers; and

18 (D) conduct research on best practices for
19 building psychological and emotional resiliency
20 in the families of such infants and toddlers in
21 coping with the deployment of such members.

22 (c) REPORTS.—

23 (1) REPORTS REQUIRED.—At the end of the
24 18-month period beginning on the date of the enact-
25 ment of this Act, and at the end of the 36-month

1 period beginning on that date, each entity with
2 which the Secretary of Defense enters into a con-
3 tract or agreement under subsection (a) or (b) shall
4 submit to the Secretary, and to Congress, a report
5 on the activities of such entity under such contract.

6 (2) ELEMENTS.—Each report under paragraph
7 (1) shall include the following:

8 (A) An assessment of the extent to which
9 outreach to parents and other caretakers of
10 children, or infants and toddlers, as applicable,
11 of members of the National Guard and Reserve
12 was effective in reaching such parents and care-
13 takers and in mitigating the adverse effects of
14 the deployment of such members on such chil-
15 dren or infants and toddlers.

16 (B) An assessment of the effectiveness of
17 the programs and activities under such contract
18 in increasing collaboration and service provision
19 in community agencies serving family members
20 of the National Guard and Reserve undergoing
21 deployment.

22 (C) An assessment of the effectiveness of
23 training materials for education, mental health,
24 health, and family support professionals devel-
25 oped under such contract in increasing aware-

ness of their role in assisting families in addressing and mitigating the adverse effects on children, or infants and toddlers, of the deployment of members of the National Guard and Reserve.

(D) A description of best practices identified under such contract for building psychological and emotional resiliency in children, or infants and toddlers, in coping with the deployment of members of the National Guard and Reserve.

(d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

(1) SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN.—There is hereby authorized to be appropriated for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2008, \$6,000,000 to carry out subsection (a).

(2) SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS.—There is hereby authorized to be appropriated for the Department of Defense for fiscal year 2008, \$6,000,000 to carry out subsection (b).

**SEC. 6. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS
OF DISABLED MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL
GUARD AND RESERVE.**

(a) EXPANSION OF AVAILABILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
2 Affairs and the Secretary of Defense shall jointly
3 take appropriate actions to expand and enhance ac-
4 cess to mental health services for family members of
5 members and former members of the National
6 Guard and Reserve who are disabled during military
7 service.

8 (2) SERVICES.—Access to mental health serv-
9 ices shall be expanded under paragraph (1) by the
10 provision of mental health services through the fol-
11 lowing:

12 (A) Community-based outpatient clinics of
13 the Department of Veterans Affairs staffed by
14 personnel of the Department.

15 (B) Referral to appropriate facilities of the
16 Department of Veterans Affairs for the receipt
17 of such services.

18 (C) Referral to appropriate mental health
19 professionals in the community for receipt of
20 such services.

21 (D) Providers of telemental health services.

22 (3) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—
23 There is hereby authorized to be appropriated for
24 the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year
25 2008, \$8,000,000 to carry out this section.

1 (b) COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT ON ACCESS TO
2 MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES THROUGH TRICARE.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
4 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
5 Comptroller General of the United States shall sub-
6 mit to Congress a report on barriers to access to
7 mental health services through the TRICARE pro-
8 gram, including the number of mental health serv-
9 ices providers under the TRICARE program that
10 are located more than 40 miles from a military in-
11 stallation.

12 (2) RECOMMENDATIONS.—The report under
13 paragraph (1) shall include recommendations for—

14 (A) increasing access to mental health
15 services providers under the TRICARE pro-
16 gram for members of the National Guard and
17 their families; and

18 (B) increasing the number of mental
19 health services providers under the TRICARE
20 program in areas located more than 40 miles
21 from a military installation.

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