

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1583

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct an education program and peer support program for the education and training of family members and caregivers of veterans with mental health disorders.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 28, 2013

Mr. SANDERS introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct an education program and peer support program for the education and training of family members and caregivers of veterans with mental health disorders.

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 “Mental Health Support
5 for Veteran Families and Caregivers Act of 2013”.

1 **SEC. 2. EDUCATION PROGRAM AND PEER SUPPORT PRO-**
2 **GRAM FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND CARE-**
3 **GIVERS OF VETERANS WITH MENTAL**
4 **HEALTH DISORDERS.**

5 (a) PROGRAMS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days
7 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
8 retary of Veterans Affairs shall establish an edu-
9 cation program (in this section referred to as the
10 “education program”) and a peer support program
11 (in this section referred to as the “peer support pro-
12 gram”) for the education and training of family
13 members and caregivers of eligible veterans with
14 mental health disorders.

15 (2) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

16 (A) FAMILY MEMBER; CAREGIVER.—The
17 terms “family member” and “caregiver” have
18 the meaning given those terms in section
19 1720G(d) of title 38, United States Code.

20 (B) ELIGIBLE VETERAN.—The term “eligi-
21 ble veteran” means a veteran who is enrolled in
22 the health care system established under section
23 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.

24 (b) EDUCATION PROGRAM.—

25 (1) IN GENERAL.—Under the education pro-
26 gram, the Secretary shall provide a course of edu-

1 cation to family members and caregivers of eligible
2 veterans on matters relating to coping with mental
3 health disorders in veterans.

4 (2) DURATION.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—The education program
6 shall be carried out during the four-year period
7 beginning on the date of the commencement of
8 the education program.

9 (B) AUTHORITY FOR EXTENSION.—The
10 Secretary may extend the duration of the edu-
11 cation program for an additional four years.

12 (3) LOCATIONS.—

13 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as required by
14 subparagraph (C), the Secretary shall carry out
15 the education program at the following facilities
16 of the Department of Veterans Affairs:

17 (i) Not less than 10 medical centers of
18 the Department.

19 (ii) Not less than 10 clinics of the De-
20 partment.

21 (iii) Not less than 10 centers for read-
22 justment counseling and related mental
23 health services for veterans under section
24 1712A of title 38, United States Code
25 (commonly referred to as “vet centers”).

1 (B) CONSIDERATIONS.—In selecting loca-
2 tions for the program, the Secretary shall con-
3 sider the feasibility and advisability of selecting
4 locations in the following areas:

5 (i) Rural areas.

6 (ii) Areas that are not in close prox-
7 imity to an active duty installation.

8 (iii) Areas in different geographic lo-
9 cations.

10 (C) EXPANSION OF LOCATIONS.—Not later
11 than two years after the date of the commence-
12 ment of the education program, the Secretary
13 shall expand the number of facilities at which
14 the Secretary is carrying out the education pro-
15 gram to include the following:

16 (i) Not less than 10 additional med-
17 ical centers of the Department.

18 (ii) Not less than 10 additional clinics
19 of the Department.

20 (iii) Not less than 10 additional vet
21 centers.

22 (4) CONTRACTS.—

23 (A) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the
24 education program, the Secretary shall enter
25 into contracts with qualified entities described

1 in subparagraph (B) to offer the course of edu-
2 cation described in paragraph (5) to family
3 members and caregivers of eligible veterans and
4 covered veterans.

5 (B) QUALIFIED ENTITY DESCRIBED.—A
6 qualified entity described in this subparagraph
7 is a non-profit entity with experience in mental
8 health education and outreach, including work
9 with children, teens, and young adults, that—

10 (i) uses high quality, relevant, and
11 age-appropriate information in educational
12 programming, materials, and coursework,
13 including such programming, materials,
14 and coursework for children, teens, and
15 young adults; and

16 (ii) works with agencies, departments,
17 nonprofit mental health organizations,
18 early childhood educators, and mental
19 health providers to develop educational
20 programming, materials, and coursework.

21 (C) PRIORITY.—In entering into contracts
22 under this paragraph, the Secretary shall give
23 priority to qualified entities that, to the max-
24 imum extent practicable, use Internet tech-
25 nology for the delivery of course content in an

1 effort to expand the availability of support serv-
2 ices, especially in rural areas.

3 (5) ELEMENTS.—The course of education de-
4 scribed in this paragraph shall consist of not less
5 than 10 weeks of education and shall include the fol-
6 lowing:

7 (A) General education on different mental
8 health disorders, including information to im-
9 prove understanding of the experiences of indi-
10 viduals suffering from those disorders.

11 (B) Techniques for handling crisis situa-
12 tions and administering mental health first aid
13 to individuals suffering from mental health dis-
14 orders.

15 (C) Techniques for coping with the stress
16 of living with someone with a mental health dis-
17 order.

18 (D) Information on additional services
19 available for family members and caregivers
20 through the Department or community organi-
21 zations and providers related to mental health
22 disorders.

23 (E) Such other matters as the Secretary
24 considers appropriate.

25 (6) INSTRUCTORS.—

1 (A) TRAINING.—Each instructor of the
2 course of education described in paragraph (5)
3 shall maintain a level of proficiency in the
4 course of education as determined by the Sec-
5 retary, and shall submit proof of that level of
6 proficiency to the Secretary at such time and in
7 such manner as the Secretary determines ap-
8 propriate.

9 (B) INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE COMPLETED
10 THE COURSE AS INSTRUCTORS.—Commencing
11 as of the date that is two years after the date
12 of the commencement of the education pro-
13 gram, any individual who has successfully com-
14 pleted the course of education described in
15 paragraph (5) and has successfully completed
16 such additional training as is required for in-
17 structors pursuant to subparagraph (A) may
18 act as an instructor in the course of education.

19 (7) MONITORING OF INSTRUCTION.—

20 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall se-
21 lect mental health care providers of the Depart-
22 ment to monitor, in consultation with primary
23 care providers, the progress of the instruction
24 provided under the education program. Such
25 mental health care providers shall carry out

1 such monitoring by meeting quarterly with in-
2 structors of the course of education described in
3 paragraph (5).

4 (B) REPORT.—Not less frequently than
5 semiannually, each mental health care provider
6 selected under subparagraph (A) shall submit
7 to the Secretary a report on the progress of the
8 instruction provided under the education pro-
9 gram.

10 (c) PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Under the peer support pro-
12 gram, the Secretary shall provide peer support to
13 family members and caregivers of eligible veterans
14 on matters relating to coping with mental health dis-
15 orders in veterans.

16 (2) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall provide
17 peer support under the peer support program at
18 each location at which the Secretary provides edu-
19 cation under the education program.

20 (3) ELEMENTS.—Peer support under the peer
21 support program shall consist of meetings in group
22 settings between a peer support coordinator under
23 paragraph (4) and family members and caregivers of
24 eligible veterans on matters relating to coping with
25 mental health disorders in veterans. At each loca-

1 tion, those meetings shall be conducted not less
2 often than twice each calendar quarter.

3 (4) PEER SUPPORT COORDINATOR.—

4 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, acting
5 through the director of each participating facil-
6 ity, shall select an individual who has success-
7 fully completed the course of education de-
8 scribed in subsection (b)(5) to serve as a peer
9 support coordinator for each such facility to
10 carry out the peer support program.

11 (B) PROFICIENCY OF INSTRUCTORS.—

12 Each peer support coordinator shall maintain a
13 level of proficiency in peer support as deter-
14 mined by the Secretary, and shall submit proof
15 of that level of proficiency to the Secretary at
16 such time and in such manner as the Secretary
17 determines appropriate.

18 (5) MENTORS.—The Secretary shall select a
19 mental health care provider of the Department to
20 serve as a mentor to each peer support coordinator.

21 (6) MONITORING OF PEER SUPPORT COORDINA-
22 TORS.—The mental health care providers of the De-
23 partment selected under subsection (b)(7) shall—

1 (A) monitor the progress of the peer sup-
2 port program by meeting quarterly with peer
3 support coordinators; and

4 (B) not less frequently than semiannually,
5 submit to the Secretary a report on the
6 progress of the peer support program.

7 (d) SURVEYS.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall conduct
9 a comprehensive and statistically significant survey
10 of the satisfaction of individuals that have partici-
11 pated in the course of education described in sub-
12 section (b)(5) and individuals that have participated
13 in the peer support program that includes the fol-
14 lowing:

15 (A) The general satisfaction of those indi-
16 viduals with the education and assistance pro-
17 vided in the education program and the peer
18 support program.

19 (B) The perceived effectiveness of the edu-
20 cation program and the peer support program
21 in providing education and assistance that is
22 useful for those individuals.

23 (C) The applicability of the education pro-
24 gram and the peer support program to the
25 issues faced by those individuals.

1 (D) Such other matters as the Secretary
2 considers appropriate.

3 (E) A representative sample of the infor-
4 mation required by subparagraphs (A) through
5 (D) from each Veterans Integrated Service Net-
6 work that is participating in the education pro-
7 gram and the peer support program.

8 (2) COMPILATION OF INFORMATION.—The in-
9 formation compiled as a result of the surveys re-
10 quired by paragraph (1) shall be included in the an-
11 nual report required by subsection (e)(1).

12 (e) REPORTS.—

13 (1) ANNUAL REPORT.—

14 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
15 after the date of the commencement of the edu-
16 cation program and not later than September
17 30 each year thereafter until 2017, the Sec-
18 retary shall submit to the Committee on Vet-
19 erans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee
20 on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Represent-
21 atives a report on the education program and
22 the peer support program.

23 (B) ELEMENTS.—Each report submitted
24 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-
25 lowing:

1 (i) The number of individuals that
2 participated in the course of education de-
3 scribed in subsection (b)(5) during the
4 year preceding the submission of the re-
5 port.

6 (ii) The number of individuals that
7 participated in the peer support program
8 during the year preceding the submission
9 of the report.

10 (iii) A detailed analysis of the surveys
11 conducted under subsection (d) with re-
12 spect to the individuals described in clause
13 (i) and (ii).

14 (iv) A summary of feedback with re-
15 spect to the education program and the
16 peer support program received from the
17 mentors selected under subsection (e)(5)
18 and the monitors selected under subsection
19 (b)(7).

20 (v) The degree to which veterans and
21 family members and caregivers of veterans
22 are aware of the eligibility requirements
23 for enrollment in the education program
24 and the peer support program.

1 (vi) Any plans for expansion of the
2 education program and the peer support
3 program.

4 (vii) The interim findings and conclu-
5 sions of the Secretary with respect to the
6 success of the education program and the
7 peer support program.

8 (2) FINAL REPORT.—

9 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
10 after the completion of the education program,
11 the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on
12 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Com-
13 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of
14 Representatives a report on the feasibility and
15 advisability of continuing the education pro-
16 gram and the peer support program.

17 (B) ELEMENTS.—The report submitted
18 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-
19 lowing:

20 (i) A detailed analysis of the surveys
21 conducted under subsection (d).

22 (ii) The feasibility and advisability of
23 continuing the education program without
24 entering into contracts for the course of
25 education described in subsection (b)(5)

1 and instead using peer support coordina-
2 tors selected under subsection (c)(4) as in-
3 structors of the course of education.

4 (iii) The feasibility and advisability of
5 expanding the education program and the
6 peer support program.

○