

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015”.

SEC. 2. FIVE-YEAR EXTENSION OF HOMELESS VETERANS REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS.

Section 2021(e)(F) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “2015” and inserting “2020”.

SEC. 3. CLARIFICATION OF ELIGIBILITY FOR SERVICES UNDER HOMELESS VETERANS REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS.

Subsection (a) of section 2021 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking “reintegration of homeless veterans into the labor force.” and inserting the following: “reintegration into the labor force of—”

“(1) homeless veterans;

“(2) veterans participating in the Department of Veterans Affairs supported housing program for which rental assistance provided pursuant to section 8(o)(19) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437f(o)(19)); and

“(3) veterans who are transitioning from being incarcerated.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) and the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous material on H.R. 474.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 474, the Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015 would extend this very good job training and placement program for homeless veterans.

This bill would also make some commonsense changes to the program’s eligibility rules by making veterans housed under the HUD-VA supported housing program and formerly incarcerated veterans eligible for HVRP.

Mr. Speaker, by making those eligibility changes, we will be offering training and placement services to groups of veterans who are largely unemployed and have significant barriers to employment. The program’s history of a job placement rate of 70 percent has been recognized by many as among the best in the Federal Government and I believe warrants its continuation.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise in support of H.R. 474, the Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2015. This bipartisan bill reauthorizes the highly successful Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program, HVRP, which provides grants to train and reintegrate homeless veterans into meaningful employment.

H.R. 474 also clarifies that in addition to homeless veterans, those participating in the HUD-VASH voucher program and those transitioning from being incarcerated are also eligible to participate in HVRP. HVRP is unique among Federal programs, as it is dedicated to providing employment assistance to homeless veterans. Other programs that we hear much about focus on needs such as emergency shelter, food, and abuse treatment.

Homeless veterans often face a variety of problems that can bar them from traditional employment pathways, including severe PTSD, histories of substance abuse, and encounters with the criminal justice system. HVRP service providers give our homeless veterans specialized intensive counseling and services to help them find a positive pathway forward, resulting in gainful employment.

This bill will not incur any direct spending costs, nor will discretionary costs be beyond the minimal.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank Chairman WENSTRUP for his hard work on this bill, as well as Ranking Member TAKANO for his efforts to advance this legislation, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support my bill, H.R. 474. I have no further speakers at this time, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I, too, urge my colleagues to support H.R. 474. It is a good bill that will reauthorize and clarify the Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Again, Mr. Speaker, I encourage all Members to support my bill, H.R. 474, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 474.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ENSURING VA EMPLOYEE ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1038) to amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to retain a copy of any reprimand or admonishment received by an employee of the Department in the permanent record of the employee.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1038

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act”.

SEC. 2. RETENTION OF RECORDS OF REPRIMANDS AND ADMONISHMENTS RECEIVED BY EMPLOYEES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

“§ 714. Record of reprimands and admonishments

“If any employee of the Department receives a reprimand or admonishment, the Secretary shall retain a copy of such reprimand or admonishment in the permanent record of the employee as long as the employee is employed by the Department.”.

(b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended by adding at the end the following new item:

“714. Record of reprimands and admonishments.”.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) and the gentlewoman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous material on H.R. 1038.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, currently, if a VA employee is either reprimanded or admonished for their performance, all records of those administrative punishments are removed from the employee’s personnel file within 3 years and 2 years, respectively. Subsequent to the removal of these personnel actions, there is no record of their poor performance or acts regardless of how many different jobs they hold within the VA or how long they remain a VA employee.

Mr. Speaker, personnel policies and rules such as we are addressing today are part of the culture of no accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs that have contributed significantly to the recent public scandals. The list of scandals now includes the abuse of the purchase card program where some VA employees were spending \$5 billion annually on goods and services without contracts, which was exposed at the Veterans’ Affairs Committee hearings last Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to ensure that only the most ethical and most qualified employees who benefit from the tax dollars that support them move up through the ranks at VA. One way to assist that is to retain an employee’s entire history in their personnel file. Now, no one is saying that employees can’t improve their performance after being reprimanded or admonished, but managers should know the complete history of their staff or potential staff members.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I, too, rise in support of H.R. 1038, the Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act of 2015.

Currently, when a VA employee is reprimanded for misconduct, the paperwork describing the incident is removed from that employee's file after 3 years. Paperwork describing an incident leading to an admonishment is taken out after just 2 years. H.R. 1038 requires the Secretary to maintain all written reprimands and admonishments of any VA employee in that employee's file for the entire duration of his or her employment at VA.

As members of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee work to ensure effective oversight of VA actions, it is important to maintain a record of VA employees' past misconduct. At the same time we are working toward greater accountability, we must also ensure that increased transparency does not come at the expense of fairness and the equitable treatment of VA employees.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with my colleagues and all interested parties to clarify the intent of this legislation to ensure that we are not inadvertently affecting the use of negotiated settlement agreements when appropriate and that admonishments and reprimands are not wrongly used to silence whistleblowers.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. COSTELLO), the author of this bill.

Mr. COSTELLO of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to come before you today to speak on behalf of this commonsense effort to ensure greater employee accountability within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

We all agree that our veterans deserve the best service and care possible, and it is our responsibility to ensure that that care is provided by responsible employees.

My legislation, H.R. 1038, Ensuring VA Employee Accountability Act, is a further step in this direction. As you know, the VA carries out their disciplinary actions in a tiered system, and the two most commonly used are the lower-tiered actions, admonishments and reprimands.

As the VA continues to review the findings of the recent inspector general's investigations related to data manipulation, backlogs, and excessive wait times, it is apparent that a greater number of admonishments and reprimands are being issued to at-fault employees.

However, in the current policy, these disciplinary actions remain in an employee's file for only 3 years and are then deleted. This prevents the keeping of complete employee files and doesn't allow the poor performers within the VA to be tracked or held accountable.

Veterans expect the correct disciplinary action to be administered—indeed, all taxpayers do—and not simply the issuance of a temporary written warning. Therefore, as the VA continues to issue these lower-tier disciplinary actions more heavily than others, it is important that the personnel actions remain in the employee's record while employed at the VA.

My bill requires all reprimands and admonishments remain in a VA employee's file as long as they are employed at the VA, ensuring that the VA maintains good, complete employee records and holds those who care for our veterans accountable.

There are some concerns that this legislation could negatively impact flexibility in resolving routine personnel disputes, but there is nothing in this bill that imposes new employee penalties or would affect the existing process for a VA employee to appeal a disciplinary action.

We are open to working with our Senate counterparts to ensure that nothing in this legislation prevents a VA employee's ability to dispute a disciplinary action before a reprimand or admonishment is placed in their record. It is simply another tool for the Secretary to hold employees accountable during their tenure at the VA.

Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues will support my legislation to promote transparency and accountability where it is needed.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I commend Mr. COSTELLO for his work on this bill.

I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1038 and to work with all of us to make sure going forward that the intent of the bill is accurately realized.

I yield back the balance of my time. Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support H.R. 1038, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1038.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SERVICE DISABLED VETERAN OWNED SMALL BUSINESS RELIEF ACT

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1313) to amend title 38, United States Code, to enhance the treatment of certain small business concerns for purposes of Department of Veterans Affairs contracting goals and preferences.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1313

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Relief Act".

SEC. 2. MODIFICATION OF TREATMENT UNDER CONTRACTING GOALS AND PREFERENCES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 8127(h) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking "rated as" and all that follows through "disability." and inserting a period; and

(2) in paragraph (2), by amending subparagraph (C) to read as follows:

"(C) The date that—

"(i) in the case of a surviving spouse of a veteran with a service-connected disability rated as 100 percent disabling or who dies as a result of a service-connected disability, is 10 years after the date of the veteran's death; or

"(ii) in the case of a surviving spouse of a veteran with a service-connected disability rated as less than 100 percent disabling who does not die as a result of a service-connected disability, is three years after the date of the veteran's death.".

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by subsection (a) shall take effect on the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act and shall apply with respect to contracts awarded on or after such date.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. WENSTRUP) and the gentleman from Nevada (Ms. TITUS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and to add extraneous material on H.R. 1313.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

Mr. WENSTRUP. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1313 would amend title 38 to allow certain surviving spouses of service-disabled small-business owners to continue to be classified as a service-disabled veteran-owned small business for a 3-year period following the death of the veteran owner.

Current law limits the continuation to just the surviving spouses of disabled veterans rated at 100 percent by VA. By changing the law, we will enable surviving spouses of the vast majority of small businesses owned by service-disabled veterans to make the transition from a preferred VA contractor to the private sector market. This small change will also provide a large measure of financial stability to surviving spouses.

I see this as another commonsense bill, and I thank Mr. MCNERNEY for bringing it to us.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. TITUS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to support H.R. 1313, the Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business Relief Act of