

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1652

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating Veteran Student Centers.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 8, 2019

Ms. FRANKEL (for herself and Mr. BILIRAKIS) introduced the following bill;
which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor

A BILL

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating Veteran Student Centers.

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 “Veteran Education
5 Empowerment Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Over 1,000,000 veterans attend institutions
9 of higher education each year.

1 (2) Veterans face unique challenges in transi-
2 tioning from the battlefield to the classroom and
3 eventually to the workforce, including: age dif-
4 ferences, family obligations, significant time away
5 from academic life, and service-related disabilities.

6 (3) The National Education Association found
7 that veteran students can feel lonely and vulnerable
8 on campus and that “connecting student veterans
9 can effectively ease this isolation” by bringing to-
10 gether new veteran students with those who have al-
11 ready successfully navigated the first few semesters
12 of college.

13 (4) According to Mission United—a United
14 Way program that helps veterans re-acclimate to ci-
15 vilian life—it is often “essential” for veteran stu-
16 dents to be mentored by “another veteran who un-
17 derstands their mindset and experience”.

18 (5) Veteran Student Centers are recognized as
19 an institutional best practice by Student Veterans of
20 America.

21 (6) The American Council on Education, which
22 represents more than 1,700 institutions of higher
23 education across the United States, has called hav-
24 ing a dedicated space for veterans on campus “a
25 promising way for colleges and universities to better

1 serve veterans on campus” and a “critical” compo-
2 nent of many colleges’ efforts to serve their veteran
3 students.

4 (7) The Department of Education included as
5 one of its 8 Keys to Veterans’ Success that colleges
6 and universities should “coordinate and centralize
7 campus efforts for all veterans, together with the
8 creation of a designated space for them”.

9 (8) Budget constraints often make it difficult or
10 impossible for institutions of higher education to
11 dedicate space to veteran offices, lounges, or student
12 centers.

13 (9) The 110th Congress authorized the funding
14 of Veteran Student Centers through the Centers of
15 Excellence for Veteran Student Success under part
16 T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of 1965
17 (20 U.S.C. 1161t). Congress also chose to appro-
18 priate funding for this program for fiscal year 2015
19 under the Consolidated and Further Continuing Ap-
20 propriations Act, 2015 (Public Law 113–235).

21 (10) According to the Department of Edu-
22 cation, federally funded Veteran Student Centers
23 and staff have generated improved recruitment, re-
24 tention, and graduation rates, have helped veteran
25 students feel better connected across campus, and

1 have directly contributed to veteran students' suc-
2 cessful academic outcomes.

3 **SEC. 3. GRANT PROGRAM TO ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND**
4 **IMPROVE VETERAN STUDENT CENTERS.**

5 Part T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of
6 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t) is amended to read as follows:

7 **“PART T—GRANTS FOR VETERAN STUDENT**
8 **CENTERS**

9 **“SEC. 873. GRANTS FOR VETERAN STUDENT CENTERS.**

10 “(a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—Subject to the avail-
11 ability of appropriations under subsection (h), the Sec-
12 retary shall award grants to institutions of higher edu-
13 cation or consortia of institutions of higher education to
14 assist in the establishment, maintenance, improvement,
15 and operation of Veteran Student Centers.

16 “(b) ELIGIBILITY.—

17 “(1) APPLICATION.—An institution or consor-
18 tium seeking a grant under subsection (a) shall sub-
19 mit to the Secretary an application at such time, in
20 such manner, and containing such information as
21 the Secretary may require.

22 “(2) CRITERIA.—The Secretary may award a
23 grant under subsection (a) to an institution or a
24 consortium if the institution or consortium meets
25 each of the following criteria:

1 “(A) The institution or consortium enrolls
2 in undergraduate or graduate courses—

3 “(i) a significant number of veteran
4 students, members of the Armed Forces
5 serving on active duty, or members of a re-
6 serve component of the Armed Forces; or

7 “(ii) a significant percentage of vet-
8 eran students, members of the Armed
9 Forces serving on active duty, or members
10 of a reserve component of the Armed
11 Forces,

12 as measured by comparing, for the most recent aca-
13 demic year for which data are available, the number
14 or percentage of veteran students, members of the
15 Armed Forces serving on active duty, and members
16 of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who are
17 enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses at the
18 institution or consortium, with the average number
19 or percentage of veteran students, members of the
20 Armed Forces serving on active duty, and members
21 of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who
22 were enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses
23 at comparable institutions or consortia of institu-
24 tions.

1 “(B) The institution or consortium pre-
2 sents a sustainability plan to demonstrate that
3 the Veteran Student Center will be maintained
4 and will continue to operate after the grant pe-
5 riod has ended.

6 “(3) SELECTION CRITERIA.—In awarding
7 grants under subsection (a), the Secretary shall pro-
8 vide priority consideration to institutions or con-
9 sortia that meet one or more of the following cri-
10 teria:

11 “(A) The institution or consortium is lo-
12 cated in a region or community that has a sig-
13 nificant population of veterans.

14 “(B) The institution or consortium carries
15 out programs or activities that assist veterans
16 in the local community, and the spouses or
17 partners and children of veteran students.

18 “(C) The institution or consortium part-
19 ners in its veteran-specific programming with
20 nonprofit veteran service organizations, local
21 workforce development organizations, or other
22 institutions of higher education.

23 “(D) The institution or consortium com-
24 mits to hiring a staff at the Veteran Student
25 Center that includes veterans (including veteran

1 student volunteers and veteran students partici-
2 pating in a Federal work-study program under
3 part C of title IV, a work-study program ad-
4 ministered by the Secretary of Veteran Affairs,
5 or a State work-study program).

6 “(E) The institution or consortium com-
7 mits to using a portion of the grant received
8 under this section to develop or maintain a vet-
9 eran student retention program carried out by
10 the Veteran Student Center.

11 “(F) The institution or consortium com-
12 mits to providing mental health counseling to
13 its veteran students (and the spouses or part-
14 ners and children of such students).

15 “(c) USE OF FUNDS.—

16 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An institution or consor-
17 tium that is awarded a grant under subsection (a)
18 shall use such grant to establish, maintain, improve,
19 or operate a Veteran Student Center.

20 “(2) OTHER ALLOWABLE USES.—An institution
21 or consortium receiving a grant under subsection (a)
22 may use a portion of such grant to carry out sup-
23 portive instruction services for veteran students, in-
24 cluding—

1 “(A) assistance with special admissions
2 and transfer of credit from previous postsec-
3 ondary education or experience; and

4 “(B) any other support services the insti-
5 tution or consortium determines to be necessary
6 to ensure the success of veteran students in
7 achieving education and career goals.

8 “(d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

9 “(1) DURATION.—Each grant awarded under
10 subsection (a) shall be for a 4-year period.

11 “(2) TOTAL AMOUNT OF GRANT AND SCHED-
12 ULE.—Each grant awarded under subsection (a)
13 may not exceed a total of \$500,000. The Secretary
14 shall disburse to an institution or consortium the
15 amount awarded under the grant in such amounts
16 and at such times during the grant period as the
17 Secretary determines appropriate.

18 “(e) REPORT.—From the amounts appropriated to
19 carry out this section, and not later than 3 years after
20 the date on which the first grant is awarded under sub-
21 section (a), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a re-
22 port on the grant program established under subsection
23 (a), including—

24 “(1) the number of grants awarded;

1 “(2) the institutions of higher education and
2 consortia that have received grants;

3 “(3) with respect to each such institution of
4 higher education and consortium—

5 “(A) the amounts awarded;

6 “(B) how such institution or consortium
7 used such amounts;

8 “(C) a description of the demographics of
9 veteran students (and spouses or partners and
10 children of such students) to whom services
11 were offered as a result of the award;

12 “(D) the number of veteran students (and
13 spouses or partners and children of such stu-
14 dents) to whom services were offered as a result
15 of the award, and a description of the services
16 that were offered and provided; and

17 “(E) data enumerating whether the use of
18 the amounts awarded helped veteran students
19 at the institution or consortium toward comple-
20 tion of a degree, certificate, or credential;

21 “(4) best practices for veteran student success,
22 identified by reviewing data provided by institutions
23 and consortia that received a grant under this sec-
24 tion; and

1 “(5) a determination by the Secretary with re-
2 spect to whether the grant program under this sec-
3 tion should be extended or expanded.

4 “(f) DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES
5 WEBSITE.—Subject to the availability of appropriations
6 under subsection (h) and not later than 3 years after the
7 date on which the first grant is awarded under subsection
8 (a), the Secretary shall develop and implement a website
9 for Veteran Student Centers at institutions of higher edu-
10 cation, which details best practices for serving veteran stu-
11 dents at institutions of higher education.

12 “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

13 “(1) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—
14 The term ‘institution of higher education’ has the
15 meaning given the term in section 101.

16 “(2) VETERAN STUDENT CENTER.—The term
17 ‘Veteran Student Center’ means a dedicated space
18 on a campus of an institution of higher education
19 that provides students who are veterans, members of
20 the Armed Forces serving on active duty, or mem-
21 bers of a reserve component of the Armed Forces
22 with the following:

23 “(A) A lounge or meeting space for such
24 veteran students (and the spouses or partners

1 and children of such students), and veterans in
2 the community.

3 “(B) A centralized office for veteran stu-
4 dent services that—

5 “(i) is a single point of contact to co-
6 ordinate comprehensive support services
7 for veteran students;

8 “(ii) is staffed by trained employees
9 and volunteers, which includes veterans
10 and at least one full-time employee or vol-
11 unteer who is trained as a veterans’ bene-
12 fits counselor;

13 “(iii) provides veteran students with
14 assistance relating to—

15 “(I) transitioning from the mili-
16 tary to student life;

17 “(II) transitioning from the mili-
18 tary to the civilian workforce;

19 “(III) networking with other vet-
20 eran students and veterans in the
21 community;

22 “(IV) understanding and obtain-
23 ing benefits provided by the institu-
24 tion of higher education, Federal Gov-

1 ernment, and State for which such
2 students may be eligible;

3 “(V) understanding how to suc-
4 ceed in the institution of higher edu-
5 cation, including by understanding
6 academic policies, the course selection
7 process, and institutional policies and
8 practices related to the transfer of
9 academic credits; and

10 “(VI) understanding disability-re-
11 lated rights and protections under the
12 Americans with Disabilities Act of
13 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) and
14 section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
15 of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794); and

16 “(iv) provides comprehensive academic
17 and tutoring services for veteran students,
18 including peer-to-peer tutoring and aca-
19 demic mentorship.

20 “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
21 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part
22 such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2020 and
23 each succeeding fiscal year.”.

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