

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5032

To amend chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a rural recruitment office within the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit health care professionals, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 12, 2019

Mr. HUFFMAN (for himself, Mr. CASE, and Mr. GROTHMAN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a rural recruitment office within the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit health care professionals, 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 “Recruiting in Under-
5 served Rural Areas and Localities for Veterans Act” or
6 the “RURAL Veterans Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF RURAL RE-**
2 **CRUITMENT.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 73 of title 38, United
4 States Code, is amended by inserting after section 7308
5 the following new section:

6 **“§ 7308A. Office of Rural Recruitment**

7 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall estab-
8 lish an office within the Office of the Under Secretary for
9 Health to be known as the ‘Office of Rural Recruitment’
10 (in this section referred to as the ‘Office’). The purpose
11 of the Office is to improve the recruitment of health care
12 professionals for rural and highly rural community-based
13 outpatient clinics and medical centers of the Department
14 of Veterans Affairs.

15 “(b) DIRECTOR.—The Under Secretary of Health
16 shall appoint the head of the Office who shall be called
17 the Director of the Office of Rural Recruitment (in this
18 section referred to as the ‘Director’).

19 “(c) DUTIES.—(1) Annually, the Director, in collabo-
20 ration with the directors of each community-based out-
21 patient clinic and medical center of the Department of
22 Veterans Affairs, shall, to determine the hiring needs of
23 such clinics and centers, do the following:

24 “(A) Assess the efficacy of hiring incentives to
25 recruit health care professionals to practice in rural
26 and highly rural community-based outpatient clinics

1 and medical centers of the Department of Veterans
2 Affairs.

3 “(B) Assess resources and funding necessary
4 for rural and highly rural community-based out-
5 patient clinics and medical centers of the Depart-
6 ment of Veterans Affairs, which may include data
7 from the most current determination published in
8 the Federal Register pursuant to section 7412(a) of
9 this title.

10 “(C) Identify hiring incentive programs offered
11 for retaining health care professionals (including the
12 Education Debt Reduction Program, the Employee
13 Incentive Scholarship Program, and other programs
14 under chapter 76 of this title) that provide scholar-
15 ships, tuition reimbursement, and education debt re-
16 duction for health care professionals.

17 “(D) Determine the number of health care pro-
18 fessionals who accepted positions in rural and highly
19 rural community-based outpatient clinics and med-
20 ical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs
21 during the previous fiscal year.

22 “(E) Determine the number of health care pro-
23 fessionals that left positions described in subpara-
24 graph (D) during the previous fiscal year.

1 “(2) The Director, in collaboration with the directors
2 of each community-based outpatient clinic and medical
3 center of the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall de-
4 velop and implement a national plan using information
5 gathered under paragraph (1) and the strategies under
6 subsection (d) to—

7 “(A) recruit health care professionals for rural
8 and highly rural community-based outpatient clinics
9 and medical centers of the Department of Veterans
10 Affairs;

11 “(B) determine which such clinics or centers
12 are high-need;

13 “(C) develop best practices and techniques for
14 recruiting health care professionals in rural and
15 highly rural community-based outpatient clinics and
16 medical centers of the Department of Veterans Af-
17 fairs;

18 “(D) not less than twice each fiscal year, train
19 rural recruitment employees in the best practices
20 and techniques developed under subparagraph (C);
21 and

22 “(E) provide recruitment resources to the Vet-
23 erans Integrated Service Networks, rural and highly
24 rural community-based outpatient clinics, and rural
25 and highly rural medical centers of the Department

1 of Veterans Affairs, such as pamphlets and mar-
2 keting material.

3 “(3) The Director shall coordinate an annual meeting
4 for rural and highly rural community-based outpatient
5 clinics and medical centers of the Department of Veterans
6 Affairs to communicate rural recruitment needs among
7 such clinics and centers.

8 “(d) VETERANS INTEGRATED SERVICE NET-
9 WORKS.—The director of each Veterans Integrated Serv-
10 ice Network that includes at least one rural or highly rural
11 community-based outpatient clinic shall annually develop
12 and maintain a strategy to recruit health care profes-
13 sionals. Such strategy shall include the designation of at
14 least one rural recruitment employee from the human re-
15 sources department of such Veterans Integrated Service
16 Network, or if no such department exists, any department
17 within such Veterans Integrated Service Network.

18 “(e) REPORTS.—(1) The director of each rural and
19 highly rural community-based outpatient clinic and med-
20 ical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall
21 submit to the director of the respective Veterans Inte-
22 grated Service Network of such clinic an annual report
23 on hiring needs with respect to recruiting health care pro-
24 fessionals within such clinic.

1 “(2) The director of each Veterans Integrated Service
2 Network described in subsection (d) shall submit to the
3 Director an annual report containing—

4 “(A) the strategy under such subsection; and

5 “(B) a summary of hiring needs with respect to
6 recruiting health care professionals in rural and
7 highly rural community-based outpatient clinics.

8 “(3) The Secretary, acting through the Director,
9 shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of
10 the House of Representatives and Senate an annual report
11 containing the information gathered pursuant to sub-
12 section (c)(1) and the national plan under paragraph (2)
13 of such subsection.

14 “(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

15 “(1) The term ‘rural recruitment employee’
16 means an employee of a Veterans Integrated Service
17 Network designated under subsection (d) who is re-
18 sponsible for recruiting health care professionals for
19 rural and highly rural community-based outpatient
20 clinics and medical centers of the Department of
21 Veterans Affairs.

22 “(2) The terms ‘rural’ and ‘highly rural’ have
23 the meanings given such terms under the rural-
24 urban commuting codes developed by the Secretary

1 of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and
 2 Human Services.”.

3 (b) DESIGNATION OF RURAL RECRUITMENT EM-
 4 PLOYEE.—Not later than September 30, 2023, the direc-
 5 tor of each Veterans Integrated Service Network that has
 6 at least one rural or highly rural community-based out-
 7 patient clinic shall designate a rural recruitment employee
 8 as required by the strategy described under section
 9 7308A(d) of title 38, United States Code, as added by
 10 subsection (a).

11 (c) REPORTING TIMELINE.—The first reports under
 12 paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) of section 7308A(e) of title
 13 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall
 14 be submitted not later than 12 months, 18 months, and
 15 24 months, respectively, after the date of the enactment
 16 of this Act.

17 (d) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 18 at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting
 19 after the item relating to section 7308 the following new
 20 item:

“7308A. Office of Rural Recruitment.”.

21 **SEC. 3. STUDY ON A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM AND ESTAB-**
 22 **LISHMENT OF A FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR**
 23 **HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS.**

24 (a) STUDY ON THE FEASIBILITY OF A RURAL RE-
 25 CRUITMENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.—

1 (1) FEASIBILITY STUDY.—The Director of the
2 Office of Rural Recruitment established under sec-
3 tion 7308A(a) of title 38, United States Code, as
4 added by section 1(a), shall conduct a study on the
5 feasibility of a scholarship program for health care
6 professionals to attend the Uniformed Services Uni-
7 versity of the Health Sciences in exchange for serv-
8 ice as full-time employees at a rural or highly rural
9 community-based outpatient clinic or medical center
10 of the Department of Veterans Affairs for a period
11 determined by the Director.

12 (2) REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION.—Not
13 later than September 30, 2022, the Secretary, acting
14 through the Director, shall submit to Congress a re-
15 port—

16 (A) on the study conducted pursuant to
17 paragraph (1); and

18 (B) containing a recommendation with re-
19 spect to the operation of and funding for the
20 program described under paragraph (1).

21 (b) ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RURAL HEALTH QUAL-
22 ITY AND ACCESS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.—In carrying
23 out section 7302 of title 38, United States Code, the Sec-
24 retary shall establish the Rural Health Quality and Access

1 Fellowship program to provide fellowships to health care
2 professionals at the graduate or post-graduate level who—

3 (1) serve on a short-term basis as full-time em-
4 ployees at a rural or highly rural community-based
5 outpatient clinic or medical center of the Depart-
6 ment of Veterans Affairs; and

7 (2) conduct research on—

8 (A) improving the quality of rural health
9 care, including best practices for remote health
10 care;

11 (B) access to health care in rural areas;
12 and

13 (C) recruitment and retention of health
14 care professionals in rural areas.

15 (c) HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL DEFINED.—In
16 this Act, the term “health care professional” means an
17 individual who qualifies as an appointee under section
18 7402 of title 38, United States Code.

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