

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2966

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make permanent the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transport individuals to and from facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with rehabilitation, counseling, examination, treatment, and care, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 3, 2019

Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mr. CRAMER, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. HOEVEN, Mr. MANCHIN, and Ms. COLLINS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make permanent the authority of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transport individuals to and from facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with rehabilitation, counseling, examination, treatment, and care, 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 “Rural Veterans Travel
5 Enhancement Act of 2019”.

1 **SEC. 2. TREATMENT OF VET CENTERS AS DEPARTMENT OF**
 2 **VETERANS AFFAIRS FACILITIES FOR PUR-**
 3 **POSES OF PAYMENTS OR ALLOWANCES FOR**
 4 **BENEFICIARY TRAVEL.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 111 of title 38, United
 6 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
 7 lowing new subsection:

8 “(h)(1) Vet Centers shall be treated as Department
 9 facilities for purposes of providing payment of actual ex-
 10 penses of travel or allowance for travel to or from a De-
 11 partment facility under this section.

12 “(2) In this subsection, the term ‘Vet Center’ means
 13 a center for readjustment counseling and related mental
 14 health services for veterans under section 1712A of this
 15 title.”.

16 (b) APPLICABILITY.—Section 111(h) of such title, as
 17 added by subsection (a), shall apply with respect to travel
 18 occurring on or after the date of the enactment of this
 19 Act.

20 **SEC. 3. MAKING PERMANENT AUTHORITY FOR SECRETARY**
 21 **OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO TRANSPORT INDIV-**
 22 **IDUALS TO AND FROM FACILITIES OF DE-**
 23 **PARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

24 Section 111A(a) of title 38, United States Code, is
 25 amended—

26 (1) by striking paragraph (2); and

1 (2) in paragraph (1), by striking “(1)”.

2 **SEC. 4. REAUTHORIZATION OF GRANTS FOR VETERANS**
 3 **SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS FOR TRANSPOR-**
 4 **TATION OF HIGHLY RURAL VETERANS.**

5 Section 307(d) of the Caregivers and Veterans Omni-
 6 bus Health Services Act of 2010 (Public Law 111–163;
 7 38 U.S.C. 1710 note) is amended by striking “through
 8 2020” and inserting “through 2022”.

9 **SEC. 5. MEDICAL EXAMINATION PROTOCOL FOR VOLUN-**
 10 **TEER DRIVERS PARTICIPATING IN PROGRAM**
 11 **OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES FOR VET-**
 12 **ERANS.**

13 Section 111A(b) of title 38, United States Code, is
 14 amended—

15 (1) by inserting “(1)” before “The Secretary”;

16 and

17 (2) by adding at the end the following new
 18 paragraph:

19 “(2)(A) Not later than 90 days after the date of the
 20 enactment of the Rural Veterans Travel Enhancement Act
 21 of 2019, the Secretary shall develop and establish a na-
 22 tional protocol for the administration of medical examina-
 23 tions for volunteer drivers to participate in the program
 24 described in paragraph (1).

1 “(B) In developing the protocol required by subpara-
 2 graph (A), the Secretary shall consult with such persons
 3 as the Secretary determines have an interest in the pro-
 4 gram described in paragraph (1).

5 “(C)(i) The Secretary shall implement the protocol
 6 by first conducting a one year pilot program using the pro-
 7 tocol.

8 “(ii) After conducting the pilot program required by
 9 clause (i), the Secretary shall assess the pilot program and
 10 make such changes to the protocol as the Secretary con-
 11 siders appropriate.

12 “(iii) After making changes to the protocol under
 13 clause (ii), the Secretary shall implement the protocol in
 14 phases during the course of one year.”.

15 **SEC. 6. COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES**
 16 **REPORT ON TRANSPORTATION SERVICES**
 17 **FOR VETERANS.**

18 (a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than one year
 19 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comp-
 20 troller General of the United States shall submit to the
 21 Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the
 22 Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Rep-
 23 resentatives a report on the program the establishment of
 24 which was facilitated under section 111A(b) of title 38,
 25 United States Code.

1 (b) CONTENTS.—The report submitted under sub-
2 section (a) shall include the following:

3 (1) A description of the program described in
4 subsection (a), including descriptions of the fol-
5 lowing:

6 (A) The purpose of the program.

7 (B) The activities carried out under the
8 program.

9 (2) An assessment of the sufficiency of the pro-
10 gram with respect to the purpose of the program.

11 (3) An assessment of the cost effectiveness of
12 the program in relation to alternatives.

13 (4) An assessment of the health benefits for
14 veterans who have participated in the program.

15 (5) An assessment of the sufficiency of staffing
16 of employees of the department who are responsible
17 for facilitating the maintenance of the program.

18 (6) An assessment, with respect to the purpose
19 of the program, of the number of vehicles owned by
20 and operating in conjunction with the program.

21 (7) An assessment of the awareness and usage
22 of the program by veterans and their families.

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