

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5198

To direct the Secretary of Defense to establish a working group to review and recommend improvements to the casualty assistance program of the Department of Defense, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 10, 2021

Mr. BACON introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Defense to establish a working group to review and recommend improvements to the casualty assistance program of the Department of Defense, 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. CASUALTY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM: REFORM;**

4 **ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING GROUP.**

5 (a) CASUALTY ASSISTANCE REFORM WORKING
6 GROUP.—

7 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 60 days

8 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-

1 retary of Defense shall establish a working group to
2 be known as the “Casualty Assistance Reform
3 Working Group” (in this section referred to as the
4 “Working Group”).

5 (2) DUTIES.—The Working Group shall per-
6 form the following duties:

7 (A) Create standards and training for
8 CAOs across the military departments.

9 (B) Explore the possibility of establishing
10 a unique badge designation for—

11 (i) CAOs who have performed CAO
12 duty more than five times; or

13 (ii) professional CAOs.

14 (C) Commission a 30-day study that—

15 (i) documents the current workflow of
16 casualty affairs support across the military
17 departments, including administrative
18 processes and survivor engagements; and

19 (ii) performs a gap analysis and solu-
20 tion document that clearly identifies and
21 prioritizes critical changes to modernize
22 and professionalize the casualty experience
23 for survivors.

24 (D) Review the organization of the Office
25 of Casualty, Mortuary Affairs and Military Fu-

1 neral Honors to ensure it is positioned to co-
2 ordinate policy and assist in all matters under
3 its jurisdiction, across the Armed Forces, in-
4 cluding any potential intersections with the De-
5 fense Prisoner of War and Missing in Action
6 Accounting Agency.

7 (E) Explore the establishment of—

8 (i) an annual meeting, led by the Sec-
9 retary of Defense, with gold star families;
10 and

11 (ii) a surviving and gold star family
12 leadership council.

13 (F) Recommend improvements to the fam-
14 ily notification process of Arlington National
15 Cemetery.

16 (G) Explore the redesign of the Days
17 Ahead Binder, including creating an electronic
18 version.

19 (H) Consider the expansion of the DD
20 Form 93 to include more details regarding the
21 last wishes of the deceased member.

22 (I) Assess coordination between the De-
23 partment of Defense and the Office of Sur-
24 vivors Assistance of the Department of Vet-
25 erans Affairs.

1 (3) MEMBERSHIP.—The membership of the
2 Working Group shall be comprised of the following:

3 (A) The Under Secretary of Defense for
4 Personnel and Readiness, who shall serve as
5 Chair of the Working Group.

6 (B) One individual from each Armed
7 Force, appointed by the Secretary of the mili-
8 tary department concerned, who is—

9 (i) a civilian employee in the Senior
10 Executive Service; or

11 (ii) an officer in a grade higher than
12 O-6.

13 (C) One individual from the Joint Staff,
14 appointed by the Secretary of Defense, who
15 is—

16 (i) a civilian employee in the Senior
17 Executive Service; or

18 (ii) an officer in a grade higher than
19 O-6.

20 (D) The Director of the Defense Prisoner
21 of War and Missing in Action Accounting Agen-
22 cy.

23 (E) The Director of the Defense Health
24 Agency (or the designee of such Director).

1 (F) The Chief of Chaplains of each Armed
2 Force.

3 (G) Such other members of the Armed
4 Forces or civilian employees of the Department
5 of Defense whom the Secretary of Defense de-
6 termines to appoint.

7 (4) REPORT.—Not later than September 30,
8 2022, the Working Group shall submit to the Sec-
9 retary of Defense a report containing the determina-
10 tions and recommendations of the Working Group.

11 (5) TERMINATION.—The Working Group shall
12 terminate upon submission of the report under para-
13 graph (4).

14 (b) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than November
15 1, 2022, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the
16 Committees on Armed Services of the Senate and the
17 House of Representatives a report setting forth the results
18 of a review and assessment of the casualty assistance offi-
19 cer program, including the report of the Working Group.

20 (c) ESTABLISHMENT OF CERTAIN DEFINITIONS.—
21 Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment
22 of this Act, the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with
23 the Secretaries of the military departments, shall prescribe
24 regulations that establish standard definitions, for use

1 across the military departments, of the terms “gold star
2 family” and “gold star survivor”.

3 (d) CAO DEFINED.—In this section, the term
4 “CAO” means a casualty assistance officer of the Armed
5 Forces.

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