

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 32

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the outreach activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 6, 2009

Mr. MCINTYRE (for himself, Mr. KISSELL, and Mr. ETHERIDGE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the outreach activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 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 “Veterans Outreach Im-
5 provement Act of 2009”.

6 **SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENT OF OUTREACH ACTIVITIES WITHIN**
7 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 5 of title 38, United
9 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
10 lowing new subchapter:

1 “SUBCHAPTER IV—OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

2 **“§ 561. Outreach activities: coordination of activities**
3 **within the Department**

4 “(a) COORDINATION PROCEDURES.—The Secretary
5 shall establish and maintain procedures for ensuring the
6 effective coordination of the outreach activities of the De-
7 partment between and among the following:

8 “(1) The Office of the Secretary.

9 “(2) The Office of Public Affairs.

10 “(3) The Veterans Health Administration.

11 “(4) The Veterans Benefits Administration.

12 “(5) The National Cemetery Administration.

13 “(b) ANNUAL REVIEW OF PROCEDURES.—The Sec-
14 retary shall—

15 “(1) annually review the procedures in effect
16 under subsection (a) for the purpose of ensuring
17 that those procedures meet the requirements of that
18 subsection; and

19 “(2) make such modifications to those proce-
20 dures as the Secretary considers appropriate in light
21 of such review in order to better achieve that pur-
22 pose.

1 **“§ 562. Outreach activities: cooperative activities**
2 **with States; grants to States for improve-**
3 **ment of outreach**

4 “(a) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this section to
5 provide for assistance by the Secretary to State and coun-
6 ty veterans agencies to carry out programs in locations
7 within the respective jurisdictions of such agencies that
8 offer a high probability of improving outreach and assist-
9 ance to veterans, and to the spouses, children, and parents
10 of veterans, to ensure that such individuals are fully in-
11 formed about, and assisted in applying for, any veterans’
12 and veterans-related benefits and programs (including
13 State veterans’ programs) for which they may be eligible.

14 “(b) PRIORITY FOR AREAS WITH HIGH CONCENTRA-
15 TION OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—In providing assist-
16 ance under this section, the Secretary shall give priority
17 to State and county veteran agencies in locations—

18 “(1) that have relatively large concentrations of
19 populations of veterans and other individuals re-
20 ferred to in subsection (a); or

21 “(2) that are experiencing growth in the popu-
22 lation of veterans and other individuals referred to
23 in subsection (a).

24 “(c) CONTRACTS FOR OUTREACH SERVICES.—The
25 Secretary may enter into a contract with a State or county
26 veterans agency in order to carry out, coordinate, improve,

1 or otherwise enhance outreach by the Department and the
2 State or county (including outreach with respect to a State
3 or county veterans program). As a condition of entering
4 into any such contract, the Secretary shall require the
5 agency to submit annually to the Secretary a three-year
6 plan for the use of any funds provided to the agency pur-
7 suant to the contract and to meet the annual outcome
8 measures developed by the Secretary under subsection
9 (d)(4).

10 “(d) GRANTS.—(1) The Secretary may make a grant
11 to a State or county veterans agency to be used to carry
12 out, coordinate, improve, or otherwise enhance—

13 “(A) outreach activities, including activities car-
14 ried out pursuant to a contract entered into under
15 subsection (c); and

16 “(B) activities to assist in the development and
17 submittal of claims for veterans and veterans-related
18 benefits, including activities carried out pursuant to
19 a contract entered into under subsection (c).

20 “(2) A State veterans agency that receives a grant
21 under this subsection may award all or a portion of the
22 grant to county veterans agencies within the State to pro-
23 vide outreach services for veterans, on the basis of the
24 number of veterans residing in the jurisdiction of each
25 county.

1 “(3) To be eligible for a grant under this subsection,
2 a State or county veterans agency shall submit to the Sec-
3 retary an application containing such information and as-
4 surances as the Secretary may require. The Secretary
5 shall require a State or county veterans agency to include,
6 as part of the agency’s application—

7 “(A) a three-year plan for the use of the grant;
8 and

9 “(B) a description of the programs through
10 which the agency will meet the annual outcome
11 measures developed by the Secretary under para-
12 graph (4).

13 “(4)(A) The Secretary shall develop and provide to
14 the recipient of a grant under this subsection written guid-
15 ance on annual outcome measures, Department policies,
16 and procedures for applying for grants under this section.

17 “(B) The Secretary shall annually review the per-
18 formance of each State or county veterans agency that re-
19 ceives a grant under this section.

20 “(C) In the case of a State or county veterans agency
21 that is a recipient of a grant under this subsection that
22 does not meet the annual outcome measures developed by
23 the Secretary, the Secretary shall require the agency to
24 submit a remediation plan under which the agency shall
25 describe how and when it plans to meet such outcome

1 measures. The Secretary must approve such plan before
2 the Secretary may make a subsequent grant to that agen-
3 cy under this subsection.

4 “(5) No portion of any grant awarded under this sub-
5 section may be used for the purposes of administering the
6 grant funds or to subsidize the salaries of State or county
7 veterans service officers or other employees of a State or
8 county veterans agency that receives a grant under this
9 subsection.

10 “(6) Federal funds provided to a State or county vet-
11 erans agency under this subsection may not be used to
12 provide more than 50 percent of the total cost of the State
13 or county government activities described in paragraph (1)
14 and shall be used to expand existing outreach programs
15 and services and not to supplant State and local funding
16 that is otherwise available.

17 “(7) In awarding grants under this subsection, the
18 Secretary shall give priority to State and county veterans
19 agencies that serve the largest populations of veterans.

20 “(8)(A) In a case in which a county government does
21 not have a county veterans agency, the county government
22 may be awarded a grant under this subsection to establish
23 such an agency.

24 “(B) In a case in which a county government does
25 not have a county veterans agency and does not seek to

1 establish such an agency through the use of a grant under
2 this subsection, the State veterans agency for the State
3 in which the county is located may use a grant under this
4 section to provide outreach services for that county.

5 “(C) In the case of a State in which no State or coun-
6 ty veterans agency seeks to receive a grant under this sub-
7 section, the funds that would otherwise be allocated for
8 that State shall be reallocated to those States in which
9 county veterans agencies exist and have sought grants
10 under this subsection.

11 “(9) A grant under this subsection may be used to
12 provide education and training, including on-the-job train-
13 ing, for State, county, and local government employees
14 who provide (or when trained will provide) veterans out-
15 reach services in order for those employees to obtain ac-
16 creditation in accordance with procedures approved by the
17 Secretary and, for employees so accredited, for purposes
18 of continuing education.

19 “(e) DEFINITIONS.—For the purposes of this section:

20 “(1) The term ‘State veterans agency’ means
21 the element of the government of a State that has
22 responsibility for programs and activities of that
23 State government relating to veterans benefits.

24 “(2) The term ‘county veterans agency’ means
25 the element of the government of a county or mu-

1 municipality that has responsibility for programs and
2 activities of that county or municipal government re-
3 lating to veterans benefits.

4 **“§ 563. Outreach activities: funding**

5 “(a) SEPARATE ACCOUNT.—Amounts for the out-
6 reach activities of the Department under this subchapter
7 shall be budgeted and appropriated through a separate ap-
8 propriation account.

9 “(b) SEPARATE STATEMENT OF AMOUNT.—In the
10 budget justification materials submitted to Congress in
11 support of the Department budget for any fiscal year (as
12 submitted with the budget of the President under section
13 1105(a) of title 31), the Secretary shall include a separate
14 statement of the amount requested to be appropriated for
15 that fiscal year for the account specified in subsection (a).

16 **“§ 564. Definition of outreach**

17 “For purposes of this subchapter, the term ‘outreach’
18 means the act or process of taking steps in a systematic
19 manner to provide information, services, and benefits
20 counseling to veterans, and the survivors of veterans, who
21 may be eligible to receive benefits under the laws adminis-
22 tered by the Secretary to ensure that those individuals are
23 fully informed about, and assisted in applying for, any
24 benefits and programs under such laws for which they may
25 be eligible.

1 **“§ 565. Authorization of appropriations**

2 “There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
3 retary for each of fiscal years 2010, 2011, and 2012,
4 \$25,000,000 to carry out this subchapter, including mak-
5 ing grants under section 562(d) of this title.”.

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

“SUBCHAPTER IV—OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

“561. Outreach activities: coordination of activities within the Department.

“562. Outreach activities: cooperative activities with States; grants to States for
improvement of outreach.

“563. Outreach activities: funding.

“564. Definition of outreach.

“565. Authorization of appropriations.”.

9 (c) DEADLINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION.—The Sec-
10 retary of Veterans Affairs shall implement the outreach
11 activities required under subchapter IV of chapter 5 of
12 title 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a),
13 by not later than 120 days after the date of the enactment
14 of this Act.

○