

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 5904

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veteran families, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 6, 2023

Ms. PEREZ (for herself and Mr. JAMES) introduced the following bill

OCTOBER 25, 2023

Referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committee on Armed Services, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

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## A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veteran families, 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 “Helping Heroes Act  
5 of 2023”.

1 **SEC. 2. APPOINTMENT OF FAMILY COORDINATORS TO MED-**  
2 **ICAL CENTERS OF DEPARTMENT OF VET-**  
3 **ERANS AFFAIRS; ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY**  
4 **SUPPORT PROGRAM.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 17 of title  
6 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end  
7 the following new sections (and conforming the table of  
8 sections at the beginning of such chapter accordingly):

9 **“§ 1709D. Appointment of family coordinators to med-**  
10 **ical centers**

11 “(a) APPOINTMENT OF FAMILY COORDINATORS.—  
12 The Secretary shall appoint not fewer than one family co-  
13 ordinator to each medical center of the Department. Each  
14 family coordinator shall be responsible for assessing the  
15 needs of families of eligible veterans located in the geo-  
16 graphic area served by each such medical center and con-  
17 necting such families with appropriate supportive services.

18 “(b) QUALIFICATIONS.—(1) Except as provided in  
19 paragraph (2), to be eligible for an appointment under  
20 subsection (a), an individual shall—

21 “(A) be a social worker licensed, registered, or  
22 certified in accordance with the requirements of any  
23 State; and

24 “(B) have earned a graduate degree in social  
25 work or a related field.

1       “(2) The Secretary may waive the qualification re-  
2       quirements described in paragraph (1), as the Secretary  
3       determines appropriate.

4       “(c) DUTIES.—Each family coordinator appointed  
5       pursuant to subsection (a) shall be responsible for—

6               “(1) assessing the needs of families of eligible  
7       veterans located in the geographic area served by the  
8       medical center to which such family coordinator is  
9       appointed using evidence-based strategies;

10              “(2) building positive relationships with such  
11       families;

12              “(3) referring eligible veterans to local, State,  
13       and Federal entities that support such families, as  
14       the family coordinator determines appropriate;

15              “(4) developing and maintaining a list of—

16                      “(A) supportive services offered by the  
17       medical center to which such family coordinator  
18       is appointed; and

19                      “(B) supportive services offered at reduced  
20       or no cost by non-Department facilities located  
21       in the geographic area served by such medical  
22       center; and

23              “(5) developing and maintaining on a publicly  
24       available Internet website of the Department a list  
25       of supportive services available to eligible veterans

1 located in such geographic area who are enrolled in  
2 the patient enrollment system under section 1705(a)  
3 of this title.

4 “(d) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall conduct out-  
5 reach to ensure that the following are informed of family  
6 coordinators at each medical center of the Department:

7 “(1) Eligible veterans who are enrolled in such  
8 patient enrollment system.

9 “(2) Employees of the Department.

10 “(3) State, local, and Federal entities to which  
11 a family coordinator may refer an eligible veteran  
12 pursuant to subsection (c)(3).

13 “(e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

14 “(1) The term ‘eligible veteran’ means a dis-  
15 abled veteran (as defined in section 4211 of this  
16 title) with a service-connected disability rated at 70  
17 percent or more.

18 “(2) The term ‘supportive services’ has the  
19 meaning given such term in section 1709E of this  
20 title.

21 **“§ 1709E. Family Support Program**

22 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—(1) There is established in  
23 the Department a program to be known as the ‘Family  
24 Support Program’ (in this section referred to as the ‘Pro-  
25 gram’) under which the Secretary shall furnish supportive

1 services to eligible veterans, eligible children, and family  
2 members of eligible veterans.

3 “(2) To carry out the Program, the Secretary shall—

4 “(A) provide supportive services through med-  
5 ical centers of the Department;

6 “(B) collaborate with relevant State, local, and  
7 Federal entities to provide supportive services; and

8 “(C) engage in other activities in support of the  
9 Program, as the Secretary determines appropriate.

10 “(3)(A) The Secretary may carry out the Program  
11 by entering into contracts with or awarding grants to eligi-  
12 ble entities to provide supportive services to eligible vet-  
13 erans, eligible children, and family members of eligible vet-  
14 erans.

15 “(B) The Secretary shall offer to any such eligible  
16 entity awarded a contract or grant under subparagraph  
17 (A) training and technical assistance regarding the plan-  
18 ning, development, and provision of supportive services.

19 “(b) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—To be eligible to enter  
20 into a contract with, or receive a grant provided by the  
21 Secretary under subsection (a)(3)(A), an entity shall be  
22 a public or non-profit entity that is not an entity of the  
23 Department.

24 “(c) APPLICATIONS.—An eligible entity desiring a  
25 contract or grant under such subsection shall submit to

1 the Secretary an application in such form and containing  
2 such information and assurances as the Secretary deter-  
3 mines appropriate, which shall include—

4           “(1) a description of each supportive service  
5           proposed to be provided to eligible veterans, eligible  
6           children, and family members of eligible veterans;  
7           and

8           “(2) evidence of a capacity to serve families of  
9           veterans in a manner that is trauma-informed and  
10          culturally and linguistically appropriate.

11          “(d) OVERSIGHT BY SECRETARY.—As a condition of  
12 being awarded a contract or grant under such subsection,  
13 an eligible entity shall agree to permit the Secretary to  
14 conduct oversight regarding—

15           “(1) the use of funds provided under such con-  
16           tract or grant; and

17           “(2) the quality of supportive services to be  
18           provided pursuant to such contract or grant.

19          “(e) PUBLIC NOTICE.—The Secretary shall publish  
20 the requirements for eligibility for a contract or grant  
21 under this section on a publicly available Internet website  
22 of the Department.

23          “(f) COORDINATION WITH OTHER PROGRAMS OF  
24 THE DEPARTMENT.—The Secretary shall share best prac-  
25 tices with, and facilitate referrals of, eligible veterans, eli-

1 gible children, and family members of eligible veterans, as  
2 appropriate, from the Program to other programs of the  
3 Department, including the program described in section  
4 1720G(b) of this title.

5 “(g) ANNUAL REPORT FOR CONTRACT OR GRANT  
6 RECIPIENTS.—Any eligible entity awarded a contract or  
7 grant under this section shall, not later than one year  
8 after the date of the award of such contract or grant, and  
9 annually thereafter during the period covered by such con-  
10 tract or grant, submit to the Secretary a report that de-  
11 scribes the supportive services provided during the year  
12 covered by such report.

13 “(h) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall conduct out-  
14 reach to ensure that the following are informed of the sup-  
15 portive services available under the Program:

16 “(1) Eligible veterans who are enrolled in the  
17 patient enrollment system under section 1705(a) of  
18 this title.

19 “(2) Employees of the Department.

20 “(3) State, local, and Federal entities with  
21 which the Secretary collaborates pursuant to sub-  
22 section (a)(2)(B).

23 “(i) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

24 “(1) The terms ‘eligible child’ means an indi-  
25 vidual who—

1           “(A) is a ward, child (including stepchild),  
2           grandchild, or sibling (including stepsibling or  
3           halfsibling) of an eligible veteran; and

4           “(B) is less than 18 years of age.

5           “(2) The term ‘eligible veteran’ has the mean-  
6           ing given such term in section 1709D of this title.

7           “(3) The term ‘supportive services’ means serv-  
8           ices that address social, emotional, mental health,  
9           career-readiness, or other needs, including—

10           “(A) in the case of an eligible child—

11           “(i) peer-support programs;

12           “(ii) assistance completing college ad-  
13           mission and financial aid applications, in-  
14           cluding the Free Application for Federal  
15           Student Aid described in section 483(a) of  
16           the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C.  
17           1090), and accessing veterans’ education  
18           benefits (as defined under section  
19           480(c)(2) of such Act (20 U.S.C. 1087vv))  
20           to which such eligible child may be enti-  
21           tled; and

22           “(iii) after-school care and summer  
23           learning opportunities;



1           “(B) in the case of an eligible veteran, as-  
2           sistance transitioning from active duty in the  
3           Armed Forces to veteran status;

4           “(C) assistance with accessing workforce  
5           development programs, including programs pro-  
6           viding the activities authorized under section  
7           129 of the Workforce Innovation and Oppor-  
8           tunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3164), and programs of  
9           vocational rehabilitation services, including pro-  
10          grams authorized under title I of the Rehabili-  
11          tation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.);

12          “(D) wellness services, including mental,  
13          emotional, behavioral, and physical health and  
14          nutritional counseling and assistance;

15          “(E) sports and recreation activities;

16          “(F) dependent care, including home and  
17          community-based services;

18          “(G) resources for low-income families;

19          and

20          “(H) any other services or activities the  
21          Secretary considers appropriate to address such  
22          needs.”.

23          (b) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—

24                  (1) REPORT ON POTENTIAL ADDITIONAL VET-  
25          ERAN FAMILY NEEDS.—Not later than 90 days after

1 the date on which the Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
2 commences the Family Support Program established  
3 under section 1709E of title 38, United States Code,  
4 as added by subsection (a), the Secretary shall sub-  
5 mit to Congress a report on the potential need for  
6 additional resources for family members of eligible  
7 veterans who are not eligible children.

8 (2) REPORT ON FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM.—

9 Not later than one year after such date, the Sec-  
10 retary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans'  
11 Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Sen-  
12 ate a report on the progress of such Family Support  
13 Program that includes the following:

14 (A) The number of eligible veterans, eligi-  
15 ble children, and family members of eligible vet-  
16 erans who received supportive services under  
17 such Family Support Program.

18 (B) The demographic data of eligible vet-  
19 erans and family members of eligible veterans,  
20 including—

21 (i) with respect to family members of  
22 eligible veterans, the relationship to the eli-  
23 gible veteran;

24 (ii) age;

25 (iii) race;

- 1 (iv) ethnicity;
- 2 (v) gender;
- 3 (vi) disability, where applicable; and
- 4 (vii) proficiency in the English lan-
- 5 guage and whether a language other than
- 6 English is spoken at home.

7 (C) A summary of the supportive services

8 carried out under such Family Support Pro-

9 gram and the costs to the Department of Vet-

10 erans Affairs of such supportive services.

11 (D) An assessment, measured by a survey

12 of participants in such Family Support Pro-

13 gram, of whether participation in such Family

14 Support Program resulted in positive outcomes

15 for eligible veterans, eligible children, and fam-

16 ily members of eligible veterans.

17 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There

18 are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary such

19 sums as may be necessary to carry out sections 1709D

20 and 1709E of title 38, United States Code, as added by

21 subsection (a).

22 (d) DEADLINES.—

23 (1) FAMILY COORDINATOR APPOINTMENTS.—

24 The Secretary shall make the appointments required

25 under section 1709D of such title, as added by such

1 subsection, not later than one year after the date of  
2 the enactment of this Act.

3 (2) DATE FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM FULLY  
4 OPERATIONAL.—The Secretary shall ensure that the  
5 Family Support Program established under section  
6 1709E of such title, as added by such subsection, is  
7 fully operational not later one year after such date.

8 **SEC. 3. SURVEY ON NEEDS OF DISABLED VETERANS AND**  
9 **FAMILIES OF DISABLED VETERANS.**

10 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the  
11 date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter  
12 for five years, the Secretary shall conduct a survey of dis-  
13 abled veterans and families of disabled veterans to identify  
14 and better understand the needs of such disabled veterans  
15 and such families.

16 (b) CONTENT OF SURVEY.—Such survey shall include  
17 questions regarding—

18 (1) the types and quality of support disabled  
19 veterans receive from the children of such disabled  
20 veterans; and

21 (2) the unmet needs of such children.

22 (c) REPORT ON SURVEY.—Not later than 90 days  
23 after the date on which the Secretary completes each such  
24 survey, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on  
25 Appropriations of the House of Representatives and the

1 Senate and the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the  
2 House of Representatives and the Senate a report that  
3 includes the findings of each such survey.

4 **SEC. 4. INCLUSION OF INFORMATION REGARDING SUP-**  
5 **PORTIVE SERVICES IN TRANSITION ASSIST-**  
6 **ANCE PROGRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF DE-**  
7 **FENSE.**

8 Not later than one year after the date of the enact-  
9 ment of this Act, the Secretary shall include information  
10 regarding supportive services available to members of the  
11 Armed Forces who are being separated from active duty  
12 and their families, including mental health and other serv-  
13 ices for children, in the Transition Assistance Program of  
14 the Department of Defense under sections 1142 and 1144  
15 of title 10, United States Code.

16 **SEC. 5. DISCRIMINATION PROHIBITED.**

17 Programs or activities receiving funds authorized to  
18 be appropriated under section 2(c) of this Act may not  
19 discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin,  
20 religion, sex, gender, disability status, or age.

21 **SEC. 6. DEFINITIONS.**

22 In this Act:

23 (1) The term "disabled veteran" has the mean-  
24 ing given such term in section 4211 of title 38,  
25 United States Code.

1           (2) The terms “eligible veteran” and “eligible  
2 child” have the meaning given such terms in sec-  
3 tions 1709D and 1709E of such title, respectively,  
4 as added by section 2(a).

5           (3) The term “supportive services” has the  
6 meaning given such term in section 1709E of such  
7 title, as added by such section.

○