

Calendar No. 117

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 106

To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to award grants to States to improve outreach to veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 26, 2023

Ms. BALDWIN (for herself, Mr. SULLIVAN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. CRAMER, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. BARRASSO, Mr. KING, Ms. STABENOW, Mr. CASEY, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

JULY 10, 2023

Reported by Mr. TESTER, with an amendment

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in italic]

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to award grants to States to improve outreach to veterans, 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 “Commitment to Vet-
5 eran Support and Outreach Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. AUTHORITY FOR SECRETARY OF VETERANS AF-**
 2 **FAIRS TO AWARD GRANTS TO STATES TO IM-**
 3 **PROVE OUTREACH TO VETERANS.**

4 (a) **IN GENERAL.**—Chapter 63 of title 38, United
 5 States Code, is amended—

6 (1) by redesignating sections 6307 and 6308
 7 and sections 6308 and 6309, respectively; and

8 (2) by inserting after section 6306 the following
 9 new section 6307:

10 **“§ 6307. Grants to States to improve outreach to vet-**
 11 **erans**

12 **“(a) PURPOSE.**—It is the purpose of this section to
 13 provide for assistance by the Secretary to States to carry
 14 out programs that improve outreach and assistance to vet-
 15 erans and the spouses, children, and parents of veterans,
 16 to ensure that such individuals are fully informed about,
 17 and assisted in applying for, any veterans and veterans-
 18 related benefits and programs (including State veterans
 19 programs) for which they may be eligible.

20 **“(b) AUTHORITY.**—The Secretary may award grants
 21 to States—

22 **“(1)** to carry out, coordinate, improve, or other-
 23 wise enhance—

24 **“(A)** outreach activities; or

1 ~~“(B) activities to assist in the development~~
2 ~~and submittal of claims for veterans and vet-~~
3 ~~erans-related benefits; or~~

4 ~~“(2) to increase the number of county or tribal~~
5 ~~veterans service officers serving in the State by hir-~~
6 ~~ing new, additional such officers.~~

7 ~~“(e) APPLICATION.—(1) To be eligible for a grant~~
8 ~~under this section, a State shall submit to the Secretary~~
9 ~~an application therefor at such time, in such manner, and~~
10 ~~containing such information as the Secretary may require.~~

11 ~~“(2) Each application submitted under paragraph (1)~~
12 ~~shall include the following:~~

13 ~~“(A) A detailed plan for the use of the grant.~~

14 ~~“(B) A description of the programs through~~
15 ~~which the State will meet the outcome measures de-~~
16 ~~veloped by the Secretary under subsection (i).~~

17 ~~“(C) A description of how the State will dis-~~
18 ~~tribute grant amounts equitably among counties~~
19 ~~with varying levels of urbanization.~~

20 ~~“(D) A plan for how the grant will be used to~~
21 ~~meet the unique needs of American Indian veterans,~~
22 ~~Alaska Native veterans, or Native Hawaiian vet-~~
23 ~~erans, elderly veterans, women veterans, and vet-~~
24 ~~erans from other underserved communities.~~

1 “(d) DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary shall seek to en-
 2 sure that grants awarded under this section are equitably
 3 distributed among States with varying levels of urbaniza-
 4 tion.

5 “(e) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall prioritize
 6 awarding grants under this section that will serve the fol-
 7 lowing areas:

8 “(1) Areas with a critical shortage of county or
 9 tribal veterans service officers.

10 “(2) Areas with high rates of—

11 “(A) suicide among veterans; or

12 “(B) referrals to the Veterans Crisis Line.

13 “(f) USE OF COUNTY OR TRIBAL VETERANS SERV-
 14 ICE OFFICERS.—A State that receives a grant under this
 15 section to carry out an activity described in subsection
 16 (b)(1) shall carry out the activity through—

17 “(1) a county or tribal veterans service officer
 18 of the State; or

19 “(2) if the State does not have a county or trib-
 20 al veterans service officer, or if the county or tribal
 21 veterans service officers of the State cover only a
 22 portion of that State, an appropriate entity of a
 23 State, local, or tribal government, or another pub-
 24 licly funded entity, as determined by the Secretary.

1 “(g) REQUIRED ACTIVITIES.—Any grant awarded
2 under this section shall be used—

3 “(1) to expand existing programs, activities,
4 and services;

5 “(2) to hire new, additional county or tribal vet-
6 erans service officers; or

7 “(3) for travel and transportation to facilitate
8 carrying out paragraph (1) or (2).

9 “(h) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—A grant under this
10 section may be used to provide education and training, in-
11 cluding on-the-job training, for State, county, local, and
12 tribal government employees who provide (or when trained
13 will provide) veterans outreach services in order for those
14 employees to obtain accreditation in accordance with pro-
15 cedures approved by the Secretary.

16 “(i) OUTCOME MEASURES.—(1) The Secretary shall
17 develop and provide to each State that receives a grant
18 under this section written guidance on the following:

19 “(A) Outcome measures.

20 “(B) Policies of the Department.

21 “(2) In developing outcome measures under para-
22 graph (1), the Secretary shall consider the following goals:

23 “(A) Increasing the use of veterans and vet-
24 erans-related benefits, particularly among vulnerable
25 populations.

1 “(B) Increasing the number of county and trib-
2 al veterans service officers recognized by the Sec-
3 retary for the representation of veterans under chap-
4 ter 59 of this title.

5 “(j) TRACKING REQUIREMENTS.—(1) With respect
6 to each grant awarded under this section, the Secretary
7 shall track the use of veterans and veterans-related bene-
8 fits among the population served by the grant, including
9 the average period of time between the date on which a
10 veteran applies for such a benefit and the date on which
11 the veteran receives the benefit, disaggregated by type of
12 benefit.

13 “(2) Not less frequently than annually, the Secretary
14 shall submit to Congress a report on the information
15 tracked under paragraph (1).

16 “(k) PERFORMANCE REVIEW.—(1) The Secretary
17 shall—

18 “(A) review the performance of each State that
19 receives a grant under this section; and

20 “(B) make information regarding such perform-
21 ance publicly available.

22 “(l) REMEDIATION PLAN.—(1) In the case of a State
23 that receives a grant under this section and does not meet
24 the outcome measures developed by the Secretary under
25 subsection (i), the Secretary shall require the State to sub-

1 mit a remediation plan under which the State shall de-
2 scribe how and when it plans to meet such outcome meas-
3 ures.

4 “(2) The Secretary may not award a subsequent
5 grant under this section to a State described in paragraph
6 (1) unless the Secretary approves the remediation plan
7 submitted by the State.

8 “(m) MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—The amount of a grant
9 awarded under this section may not exceed 10 percent of
10 amounts made available for grants under this section for
11 the fiscal year in which the grant is awarded.

12 “(n) SUPPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLANT.—Any grant
13 awarded under this section shall be used to supplement
14 and not supplant State and local funding that is otherwise
15 available.

16 “(o) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

17 “(1) The term ‘county or tribal veterans service
18 officer’ includes a local equivalent veterans service
19 officer.

20 “(2) The term ‘Veterans Crisis Line’ means the
21 toll-free hotline for veterans established under sec-
22 tion 1720F(h) of this title.

23 “(p) FUNDING.—(1) Amounts for the activities of the
24 Department under this section shall be budgeted and ap-
25 propriated through a separate appropriation account.

1 “(2) In the budget justification materials submitted
 2 to Congress in support of the Department budget for any
 3 fiscal year (as submitted with the budget of the President
 4 under section 1105(a) of title 31), the Secretary shall in-
 5 clude a separate statement of the amount requested to be
 6 appropriated for that fiscal year for the account specified
 7 in paragraph (1).

8 “(q) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
 9 is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary for each
 10 of fiscal years 2023 through 2027, \$50,000,000 to carry
 11 out this section.”.

12 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 13 at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended
 14 by striking the items relating to sections 6307 and 6308
 15 and inserting the following new items:

“6307. Grants to States to improve outreach to veterans.

“6308. Outreach for eligible dependents.

“6309. Biennial report to Congress.”.

16 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

17 *This Act may be cited as the “Commitment to Veteran*
 18 *Support and Outreach Act”.*

19 **SEC. 2. AUTHORITY FOR SECRETARY OF VETERANS AF-**
 20 **FAIRS TO AWARD GRANTS TO STATES TO IM-**
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 23 States Code, is amended—

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2 sections 6308 and 6309, respectively; and

3 (2) by inserting after section 6306 the following
4 new section 6307:

5 **“§6307. Grants to States to improve outreach to vet-**
6 **erans**

7 “(a) *PURPOSE.*—It is the purpose of this section to
8 provide for assistance by the Secretary to States to carry
9 out programs that improve outreach and assistance to vet-
10 erans and the spouses, children, and parents of veterans,
11 to ensure that such individuals are fully informed about,
12 and assisted in applying for, any veterans and veterans-
13 related benefits and programs (including State veterans
14 programs) for which they may be eligible.

15 “(b) *AUTHORITY.*—The Secretary may award grants
16 to States—

17 “(1) to carry out, coordinate, improve, or other-
18 wise enhance—

19 “(A) outreach activities; or

20 “(B) activities to assist in the development
21 and submittal of claims for veterans and vet-
22 erans-related benefits; or

23 “(2) to increase the number of county or tribal
24 veterans service officers serving in the State by hiring
25 new, additional such officers.

1 “(c) *APPLICATION.—(1) To be eligible for a grant*
2 *under this section, a State shall submit to the Secretary*
3 *an application therefor at such time, in such manner, and*
4 *containing such information as the Secretary may require.*

5 “(2) *Each application submitted under paragraph (1)*
6 *shall include the following:*

7 “(A) *A detailed plan for the use of the grant.*

8 “(B) *A description of the programs through*
9 *which the State will meet the outcome measures devel-*
10 *oped by the Secretary under subsection (i).*

11 “(C) *A description of how the State will dis-*
12 *tribute grant amounts equitably among counties with*
13 *varying levels of urbanization.*

14 “(D) *A plan for how the grant will be used to*
15 *meet the unique needs of American Indian veterans,*
16 *Alaska Native veterans, or Native Hawaiian veterans,*
17 *elderly veterans, women veterans, and veterans from*
18 *other underserved communities.*

19 “(d) *DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary shall seek to en-*
20 *sure that grants awarded under this section are equitably*
21 *distributed among States with varying levels of urbaniza-*
22 *tion.*

23 “(e) *PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall prioritize award-*
24 *ing grants under this section that will serve the following*
25 *areas:*

1 “(1) *Areas with a critical shortage of county or*
2 *tribal veterans service officers.*

3 “(2) *Areas with high rates of—*

4 “(A) *suicide among veterans; or*

5 “(B) *referrals to the Veterans Crisis Line.*

6 “(f) *USE OF COUNTY OR TRIBAL VETERANS SERVICE*
7 *OFFICERS.—A State that receives a grant under this section*
8 *to carry out an activity described in subsection (b)(1) shall*
9 *carry out the activity through—*

10 “(1) *a county or tribal veterans service officer of*
11 *the State; or*

12 “(2) *if the State does not have a county or tribal*
13 *veterans service officer, or if the county or tribal vet-*
14 *erans service officers of the State cover only a portion*
15 *of that State, an appropriate entity of a State, local,*
16 *or tribal government, or another publicly funded enti-*
17 *ty, as determined by the Secretary.*

18 “(g) *REQUIRED ACTIVITIES.—Any grant awarded*
19 *under this section shall be used—*

20 “(1) *to expand existing programs, activities, and*
21 *services;*

22 “(2) *to hire new, additional county or tribal vet-*
23 *erans service officers; or*

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25 *carrying out paragraph (1) or (2).*

1 “(h) *AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.*—A grant under this
2 section may be used to provide education and training, in-
3 cluding on-the-job training, for State, county, local, and
4 tribal government employees who provide (or when trained
5 will provide) veterans outreach services in order for those
6 employees to obtain accreditation in accordance with proce-
7 dures approved by the Secretary.

8 “(i) *OUTCOME MEASURES.*—(1) The Secretary shall
9 develop and provide to each State that receives a grant
10 under this section written guidance on the following:

11 “(A) *Outcome measures.*

12 “(B) *Policies of the Department.*

13 “(2) *In developing outcome measures under paragraph*
14 *(1), the Secretary shall consider the following goals:*

15 “(A) *Increasing the use of veterans and veterans-*
16 *related benefits, particularly among vulnerable popu-*
17 *lations.*

18 “(B) *Increasing the number of county and tribal*
19 *veterans service officers recognized by the Secretary*
20 *for the representation of veterans under chapter 59 of*
21 *this title.*

22 “(j) *TRACKING REQUIREMENTS.*—(1) *With respect to*
23 *each grant awarded under this section, the Secretary shall*
24 *track the use of veterans and veterans-related benefits*
25 *among the population served by the grant, including the*

1 *average period of time between the date on which a veteran*
2 *applies for such a benefit and the date on which the veteran*
3 *receives the benefit, disaggregated by type of benefit.*

4 “(2) *Not less frequently than annually, the Secretary*
5 *shall submit to Congress a report on the information*
6 *tracked under paragraph (1).*

7 “(k) *PERFORMANCE REVIEW.—(1) The Secretary*
8 *shall—*

9 “(A) *review the performance of each State that*
10 *receives a grant under this section; and*

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12 *ance publicly available.*

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14 *that receives a grant under this section and does not meet*
15 *the outcome measures developed by the Secretary under sub-*
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17 *a remediation plan under which the State shall describe*
18 *how and when it plans to meet such outcome measures.*

19 “(2) *The Secretary may not award a subsequent grant*
20 *under this section to a State described in paragraph (1)*
21 *unless the Secretary approves the remediation plan sub-*
22 *mitted by the State.*

23 “(m) *MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—The amount of a grant*
24 *awarded under this section may not exceed 10 percent of*

1 *amounts made available for grants under this section for*
2 *the fiscal year in which the grant is awarded.*

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5 *not supplant State and local funding that is otherwise*
6 *available.*

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9 *officer’ includes a local equivalent veterans service of-*
10 *ficer.*

11 “(2) *The term ‘Veterans Crisis Line’ means the*
12 *toll-free hotline for veterans established under section*
13 *1720F(h) of this title.*

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15 *Department under this section shall be budgeted and appro-*
16 *priated through a separate appropriation account.*

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18 *Congress in support of the Department budget for any fiscal*
19 *year (as submitted with the budget of the President under*
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21 *separate statement of the amount requested to be appro-*
22 *priated for that fiscal year for the account specified in*
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1 *fiscal years 2023, 2024, and 2025, \$50,000,000 to carry out*
2 *this section.”.*

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