

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4276

To improve services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veteran families, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 19 (legislative day, MAY 17), 2022

Mrs. MURRAY introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

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 2022”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

8 (1) DEPARTMENT.—The term “Department”
9 means the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 (2) **DISABLED VETERAN.**—The term “disabled
2 veteran” has the meaning given that term in section
3 4211 of title 38, United States Code.

4 (3) **EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCY; LOCAL
5 EDUCATIONAL AGENCY; OTHER STAFF; SCHOOL
6 LEADER; SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT
7 PERSONNEL.**—The terms “educational service agen-
8 cy”, “local educational agency”, “other staff”,
9 “school leader”, and “specialized instructional sup-
10 port personnel” have the meanings given those
11 terms in section 8101 of the Elementary and Sec-
12 ondary Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 7801).

13 (4) **ELIGIBLE CHILD.**—The term “eligible
14 child”, with respect to an eligible veteran, means an
15 individual who—

16 (A) is a ward, child (including stepchild),
17 grandchild, or sibling (including stepsibling or
18 halfsibling) of the eligible veteran; and

19 (B) is less than 18 years of age.

20 (5) **ELIGIBLE VETERAN.**—The term “eligible
21 veteran” means a disabled veteran who has a serv-
22 ice-connected disability rated at 70 percent or more.

23 (6) **FAMILY COORDINATOR.**—The term “Family
24 Coordinator” means an individual placed at a med-
25 ical center of the Department pursuant to section 3.

1 (7) FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM.—The term
2 “Family Support Program” means the program es-
3 tablished under section 4.

4 (8) NON-DEPARTMENT PROVIDER.—The term
5 “non-Department provider” means a public or non-
6 profit entity that is not an entity of the Department.

7 (9) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
8 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

9 (10) SUPPORTIVE SERVICES.—The term “sup-
10 portive services” means services that address the so-
11 cial, emotional, and mental health, career-readiness,
12 and other needs of eligible children, including—

13 (A) wellness services, including mental,
14 emotional, behavioral, and physical health and
15 nutritional counseling and assistance;

16 (B) peer-support programs for children;

17 (C) assistance completing college admission
18 and financial aid applications, including the
19 Free Application for Federal Student Aid de-
20 scribed in section 483(a) of the Higher Edu-
21 cation Act (20 U.S.C. 1090), and accessing vet-
22 erans’ education benefits as defined under sec-
23 tion 480(c)(2) of such Act (20 U.S.C. 1087vv)
24 that eligible children may be eligible to receive;

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

9 (E) sports and recreation;

10 (F) after-school care and summer learning
11 opportunities;

12 (G) dependent care, including home and
13 community-based services;

14 (H) other resources for low-income fami-
15 lies;

16 (I) assistance transitioning from active
17 duty in the Armed Forces to veteran status;
18 and

19 (J) any other services or activities the Sec-
20 retary considers appropriate to support the
21 needs of eligible children.

22 (11) VETERAN-CONNECTED STUDENT.—The
23 term “veteran-connected student” means a student
24 whose parent or guardian previously served in the

1 Armed Forces, a Reserve component of the Armed
2 Forces, or the National Guard.

3 **SEC. 3. REQUIREMENTS FOR FAMILY COORDINATORS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years after
5 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
6 shall—

7 (1) place at each medical center of the Depart-
8 ment not fewer than one Family Coordinator; and

9 (2) ensure adequate staffing and resources at
10 each such medical center to ensure Family Coordina-
11 tors are able to carry out their duties.

12 (b) FAMILY COORDINATORS.—

13 (1) EMPLOYMENT.—Each Family Coordinator
14 placed at a medical center of the Department under
15 subsection (a) shall be employed full-time by the De-
16 partment as a Family Coordinator and shall have no
17 other duties in addition to the duties of a Family
18 Coordinator.

19 (2) QUALIFICATIONS.—To qualify to be a Fam-
20 ily Coordinator under subsection (a), an individual
21 shall—

22 (A) be a social worker licensed in accord-
23 ance with the requirements of the State in
24 which such individual is employed; and

1 (B) have a graduate degree in social work
2 or a related field.

3 (3) DUTIES.—Each Family Coordinator shall—

4 (A) assess the needs of the families of vet-
5 erans using evidence-based strategies;

6 (B) build positive relationships with such
7 families;

8 (C) refer veterans to local, State, and Fed-
9 eral resources that support veterans and their
10 families;

11 (D) develop and maintain a list of—

12 (i) supportive services offered by the
13 medical center at which the Family Coordi-
14 nator is placed; and

15 (ii) supportive services offered at re-
16 duced or no cost by non-Department pro-
17 viders located in the catchment area of
18 such medical center; and

19 (E) develop and maintain on an internet
20 website a list of family resources that shall be
21 made available for all veterans in the catchment
22 area of such medical center who are enrolled in
23 the patient enrollment system of the Depart-
24 ment established and operated under section
25 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.

1 **SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM.**

2 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
3 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
4 tablish a program to be known as the Family Support Pro-
5 gram to provide and coordinate the provision of supportive
6 services to eligible veterans and eligible children.

7 (b) IMPLEMENTATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT PRO-
8 GRAM.—To carry out the Family Support Program, the
9 Secretary shall—

10 (1) provide supportive services through medical
11 centers of the Department;

12 (2) collaborate with relevant Federal agencies
13 to provide supportive services;

14 (3) provide financial assistance to non-Depart-
15 ment providers pursuant to subsection (c); and

16 (4) engage in any other activities the Secretary
17 considers appropriate.

18 (c) FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO NON-DEPARTMENT
19 PROVIDERS.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter
21 into contracts and award grants to provide financial
22 assistance to eligible non-Department providers to
23 participate in the Family Support Program.

24 (2) ELIGIBILITY.—

25 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall es-
26 tablish and make publicly available the criteria

1 for a non-Department provider to be eligible for
2 financial assistance under this subsection.

3 (B) CRITERIA.—The criteria required by
4 subparagraph (A) shall include requirements for
5 a non-Department provider—

6 (i) to provide a description of—

7 (I) each supportive service pro-
8 posed to be provided to eligible chil-
9 dren; and

10 (II) the demonstrated record of
11 the non-Department provider in pro-
12 viding such supportive service;

13 (ii) to demonstrate the ability to serve
14 families of veterans in a manner that is
15 trauma-informed and culturally and lin-
16 guistically appropriate; and

17 (iii) to agree to oversight by the Sec-
18 retary regarding—

19 (I) the use of financial assistance
20 provided by the Department under
21 this subsection; and

22 (II) the quality of supportive
23 services provided.

24 (3) NOTICE.—The Secretary shall promptly
25 provide to eligible non-Department providers selected

1 by the Secretary to receive financial assistance under
2 this subsection notice of the award of such financial
3 assistance to ensure such providers have sufficient
4 time to prepare to provide supportive services under
5 the Family Support Program.

6 (4) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—Financial assist-
7 ance provided under this subsection shall be used to
8 provide supportive services.

9 (5) TRAINING TO RECIPIENTS OF FINANCIAL
10 ASSISTANCE.—For each recipient of financial assist-
11 ance under this subsection, the Secretary shall pro-
12 vide training and technical assistance regarding the
13 planning, development, and provision of supportive
14 services under the Family Support Program.

15 (d) COORDINATION WITH OTHER DEPARTMENT OF
16 VETERANS AFFAIRS PROGRAMS.—The Secretary shall
17 share best practices with and facilitate referrals of eligible
18 veterans and their families, as appropriate, from the Fam-
19 ily Support Program to other programs of the Depart-
20 ment, such as the program of support services for care-
21 givers of veterans under section 1720G(b) of title 38,
22 United States Code.

23 (e) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—

24 (1) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than one year
25 after the date of the commencement of the Family

1 Support Program, and annually thereafter, each
2 non-Department provider in receipt of financial as-
3 sistance under the Family Support Program shall
4 submit to the Secretary a report describing the sup-
5 portive services carried out with such financial as-
6 sistance during the year covered by such report.

7 (2) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—

8 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
9 after the commencement of the Family Support
10 Program, the Secretary shall submit to the
11 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate
12 and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the
13 House of Representatives a report on the
14 progress of the Family Support Program.

15 (B) CONTENTS.—The report required by
16 paragraph (1) shall include—

17 (i) the number of eligible veterans and
18 eligible children who received supportive
19 services under the Family Support Pro-
20 gram;

21 (ii) the demographic data of eligible
22 veterans and eligible family members, in-
23 cluding—

24 (I) the relationship to the eligible
25 veteran;

- 1 (II) age;
- 2 (III) race;
- 3 (IV) ethnicity;
- 4 (V) gender identity;
- 5 (VI) sexual orientation;
- 6 (VII) disability; and
- 7 (VIII) English proficiency and
- 8 whether a language other than
- 9 English is spoken at home;
- 10 (iii) a summary of the supportive
- 11 services carried out under the Family Sup-
- 12 port Program and the costs to the Depart-
- 13 ment of such supportive services; and
- 14 (iv) an assessment, measured by a
- 15 survey of participants, of whether partici-
- 16 pation in the Family Support Program re-
- 17 sulted in positive outcomes for eligible vet-
- 18 erans and eligible children.

19 **SEC. 5. VETERAN-CONNECTED STUDENT GRANT PROGRAM.**

20 (a) AUTHORIZATION OF GRANTS.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, in coordina-

22 tion with the Secretary of Education, shall award

23 grants, on a competitive basis, to local educational

24 agencies in order to better meet academic, social,

1 emotional, and mental health needs of veteran-con-
2 nected students.

3 (2) ELIGIBILITY.—A local educational agency
4 shall be eligible for a grant under this section if such
5 agency partners with a nearby medical center of the
6 Department that employs at least one Family Coor-
7 dinator.

8 (3) DURATION.—A grant awarded under this
9 section shall be for a period of not more than five
10 years.

11 (4) DIVERSITY OF PROJECTS.—In awarding
12 grants under this section, the Secretary shall ensure
13 that, to the extent practicable, grants are distributed
14 among local educational agencies that will serve geo-
15 graphically diverse areas, including urban, suburban,
16 and rural areas.

17 (5) PRIORITIES.—In awarding grants under
18 this section, the Secretary, in consultation with the
19 Secretary of Education, shall give priority to appli-
20 cations that are submitted by local educational agen-
21 cies that are in the highest quartile of local edu-
22 cational agencies in a ranking of all qualified local
23 educational agencies in the State, ranked in descend-
24 ing order by the number and percentage of children
25 in each agency counted under section 1124(c) of the

1 Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
2 (20 U.S.C. 6333(c)).

3 (b) APPLICATION.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—In order to receive a grant
5 under subsection (a), a local educational agency
6 shall submit an application to the Secretary, at such
7 time, in such manner, and containing such informa-
8 tion as the Secretary may reasonably require.

9 (2) CONTENTS.—An application submitted by
10 an agency under paragraph (1) shall include—

11 (A) a description of how the agency will
12 identify veteran-connected students such as
13 through survey instruments or data sharing
14 agreements, in accordance with applicable Fed-
15 eral privacy laws;

16 (B) a description of how the agency will
17 collaborate with a Family Coordinator to in-
18 crease wrap around supports provided to vet-
19 eran-connected students and families of vet-
20 erans, including how services will be provided
21 by such agency or a medical center of the De-
22 partment, as appropriate;

23 (C) a description of how the agency will
24 expand access to evidence-based academic sup-
25 ports for veteran-connected students, such as

1 tutoring or college and career counseling, to im-
2 prove the academic outcomes of such students;

3 (D) an assurance that the agency will des-
4 ignate an employee of a local educational agen-
5 cy to serve as a liaison to families of veterans
6 to coordinate with Family Coordinators to meet
7 the academic, social, emotional, and mental
8 health needs of veteran-connected students, in-
9 cluding through the Family Support Program;
10 and

11 (E) a description of a preliminary memo-
12 randum of understanding signed between the
13 agency and a partnering medical center of the
14 Department detailing the financial, pro-
15 grammatic, and long-term commitments of each
16 party to meet the academic, social, emotional,
17 and mental health needs of veteran-connected
18 students.

19 (c) USES OF FUNDS.—A local educational agency re-
20 ceiving a grant under this section shall use such grant to
21 carry out one or more of the following:

22 (1) Support activities to address the academic,
23 social, emotional, and mental health needs of vet-
24 eran-connected students.

1 (2) Provide assistance to veteran-connected stu-
2 dents to complete college admission applications and
3 financial aid applications, including the Free Appli-
4 cation for Federal Student Aid described in section
5 483(a) of the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C.
6 1090) and to access veterans' education benefits as
7 defined under section 480(c)(2) of such Act (20
8 U.S.C. 1087vv(c)(2)) such individuals may be eligi-
9 ble to receive.

10 (3) Improve mental health services and sup-
11 ports for veteran-connected students, including
12 meeting the needs of such individuals who have ex-
13 perienced adverse childhood experiences or related
14 trauma.

15 (4) Provide professional development for Family
16 Coordinators and for teachers, school leaders, spe-
17 cialized instructional support personnel, liaisons to
18 families of veterans, and other staff employed by
19 local educational agencies on the unique challenges
20 facing veteran-connected students and families of
21 veterans.

22 (5) Conduct outreach and communicate with
23 families of veterans to improve the involvement of
24 veterans who are caregivers in the academic, social,
25 emotional, and mental health needs of their children.

1 (6) Hire and retain a liaison to families of vet-
2 erans to provide supports to veteran-connected stu-
3 dents and families of veterans.

4 (7) Coordinate with Family Coordinators and
5 support the provision of services through the Family
6 Support Program.

7 (d) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—

8 (1) LOCAL REPORTING.—Not later than one
9 year after a local educational agency receives a grant
10 under this section, and annually thereafter, such
11 agency shall submit to the Secretary a report con-
12 taining such information as the Secretary may re-
13 quire, including—

14 (A) the number and percentage of veteran-
15 connected students served by the agency,
16 disaggregated by demographic data;

17 (B) information required under paragraph
18 (1)(C)(ii) of section 1111(h) of the Elementary
19 and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (20
20 U.S.C. 6311(h)) and corresponding require-
21 ments under paragraph (2) of that section for
22 all veteran-connected students served by the
23 agency; and

24 (C) a description of the academic, social,
25 emotional, and mental health services provided

1 to veteran-connected students, including wheth-
2 er such services were provided by the agency or
3 through the Family Support Program.

4 (2) SECRETARY REPORTING.—Not later than
5 one year after receiving a report described in para-
6 graph (1), the Secretary, in coordination with the
7 Secretary of Education, shall—

8 (A) prepare and submit to the Committee
9 on Veterans' Affairs and the Committee on
10 Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions of the
11 Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs
12 and the Committee on Education and Labor of
13 the House of Representatives a report that
14 summarizes the report submitted under para-
15 graph (1); and

16 (B) make the report submitted under para-
17 graph (1) publicly available on an internet
18 website of the Department.

19 (e) SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT.—Grant funds
20 provided under this section shall be used to supplement,
21 not supplant, other Federal or State funds available to
22 carry out activities described in this section.

23 (f) DISAGGREGATION OF DATA.—Disaggregation of
24 data required under this section shall not be required
25 when the number of students described in subsection

1 (d)(1)(A) is insufficient to yield statistically reliable infor-
2 mation or the results would reveal personally identifiable
3 information about an individual student.

4 **SEC. 6. OUTREACH ON AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES.**

5 The Secretary shall conduct an outreach program to
6 ensure veterans who are enrolled in the patient enrollment
7 system of the Department established and operated under
8 section 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code, employees
9 of the Department, and potential State, local, and Federal
10 partners are informed of the Family Support Program and
11 the availability of Family Coordinators.

12 **SEC. 7. TRANSITION ASSISTANCE.**

13 Not later than one year after the date of the enact-
14 ment of this Act, the Secretary shall include information
15 regarding supportive services available for members of the
16 Armed Forces who are being separated from active duty
17 and their families, including mental health and other serv-
18 ices for children, in the transition assistance curriculum
19 offered by the Department.

20 **SEC. 8. SURVEY.**

21 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
22 date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter
23 for five years, the Secretary shall conduct a survey of dis-
24 abled veterans and their families to identify and better un-

1 derstand the needs of such disabled veterans and their
2 families.

3 (b) CONTENT.—The survey required under sub-
4 section (a) shall include questions with respect to—

5 (1) the types and quality of support disabled
6 veterans receive from the children of such disabled
7 veterans; and

8 (2) the unmet needs of such children.

9 **SEC. 9. NONDISCRIMINATION.**

10 Programs or activities receiving funds under this Act
11 may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national
12 origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity,
13 disability status, or age.

14 **SEC. 10. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

15 There are authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
16 retary such funds as may be necessary to carry out this
17 Act.

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