

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5543

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of Vet Centers in certain States based on population metrics, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

OCTOBER 8, 2021

Ms. SHERRILL (for herself, Mr. SABLAN, Mr. PHILLIPS, Mr. GONZALEZ of Ohio, and Mr. FITZPATRICK) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to increase the number of Vet Centers in certain States based on population metrics, 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 Census-En-
5 abled National Treatment Equitable Resource Supplement
6 for Mental Health Act of 2021” or the “Vet CENTERS
7 for Mental Health Act of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. INCREASE IN NUMBER OF VET CENTERS IN CER-**
2 **TAIN STATES BASED ON POPULATION**
3 **METRICS.**

4 (a) INCREASE IN NUMBER.—If the Secretary of Vet-
5 erans Affairs determines that a State meets each require-
6 ment described in subsection (c), (d), or (e), the Secretary
7 shall ensure that the number of covered Vet Centers lo-
8 cated in the State is increased from the number of covered
9 Vet Centers that were located in the State on December
10 31, 2020, through the establishment of at least one addi-
11 tional covered Vet Center within the State, as applicable.

12 (b) EXISTING FACILITIES.—In establishing an addi-
13 tional covered Vet Center pursuant to a determination
14 under subsection (a), the Secretary may establish the cov-
15 ered Vet Center at a facility made available to the Sec-
16 retary by the head of a State, local government, or feder-
17 ally recognized Indian tribe to carry out this section, re-
18 gardless of whether such facility is made available at a
19 cost to the Secretary.

20 (c) REQUIREMENTS.—The requirements described in
21 this subsection are, with respect to the 2020 calendar
22 year, as follows:

23 (1) The total population of the State exceeded
24 6,000,000, as determined by the United States Cen-
25 sus Bureau.

1 (2) The average population density of the State
2 exceeded 200 individuals per square mile, as deter-
3 mined by the United States Census Bureau.

4 (3) The total veteran population in the State
5 was greater than 250,000 veterans, as estimated by
6 the Secretary.

7 (4) The ratio of veteran population in the State
8 to covered Vet Centers located in the State exceeded
9 50,000 veterans per one covered Vet Center, as de-
10 termined by the Secretary (regardless of the number
11 of veterans that received services at covered Vet
12 Centers located in the State during such year).

13 (d) ALTERNATIVE REQUIREMENTS.—The require-
14 ments described in this subsection are as follows:

15 (1) The State does not share a land border with
16 another State.

17 (2) The State is located at least 2,000 miles
18 from the contiguous United States.

19 (3) There is no covered Vet Center located in
20 the State.

21 (e) ADDITIONAL ALTERNATIVE REQUIREMENTS.—
22 The requirements described in this subsection are as fol-
23 lows:

24 (1) There are fewer than five covered Vet Cen-
25 ters located in the State.

1 (2) The land area of the State exceeds 75,000
2 square miles.

3 (3) During the 2020 calendar year, the total
4 population of the State exceeded 5,000,000 individ-
5 uals, as determined by the United States Census
6 Bureau.

7 (4) During the 2020 calendar year, the ratio of
8 veteran population in the State to covered Vet Cen-
9 ters located in the State exceeded 75,000 veterans
10 per one covered Vet Center, as determined by the
11 Secretary (regardless of the number of veterans that
12 received services at covered Vet Centers located in
13 the State during such year).

14 (f) COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS.—The
15 Secretary shall establish a covered community-based out-
16 patient clinic in each State that the Secretary determines
17 meets the following requirements:

18 (1) The State does not share a land border with
19 another State.

20 (2) The State is located at least 2,000 miles
21 from the contiguous United States.

22 (3) There is no covered community-based out-
23 patient clinic located in the State.

24 (g) DEADLINE.—The Secretary shall establish such
25 additional covered Vet Centers as may be required pursu-

1 ant to a determination under subsection (a), and such cov-
2 ered community-based outpatient clinics as may be re-
3 quired pursuant to a determination under subsection (f),
4 by not later than two years after the date of the enactment
5 of this Act.

6 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this Act:

7 (1) The term “covered community-based out-
8 patient clinic” means a community-based outpatient
9 clinic of the Department of Veterans Affairs that is
10 scheduled to be open for the provision of community-
11 based outpatient services for a minimum of eight
12 hours per day during five days of the week, except
13 that the community-based outpatient clinic may be
14 open for less than such minimum on a temporary
15 basis as a result of a Federal holiday, weather con-
16 cern, safety concern, pandemic, or for such other
17 reasons as may be determined appropriate by the
18 Secretary.

19 (2) The term “covered Vet Center”—

20 (A) means a Vet Center, as such term is
21 defined in section 1712A of title 38, United
22 States Code, that is scheduled to be open for
23 the provision of services under such section for
24 a minimum of eight hours per day during five
25 days of the week, except that the Vet Center

1 may be open for less than such minimum on a
2 temporary basis as a result of a Federal holi-
3 day, weather concern, safety concern, pandemic,
4 or for such other reasons as may be determined
5 appropriate by the Secretary; and

6 (B) does not include a Vet Center outsta-
7 tion.

8 (3) The term “State” has the meaning given
9 such term in section 101 of title 38, United States
10 Code.

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