

## Union Calendar No. 292

117<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
2<sup>D</sup> SESSION

# H. R. 6411

[Report No. 117–382]

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

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### IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 18, 2022

Mr. TAKANO (for himself and Mr. BOST) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

JUNE 22, 2022

Additional sponsors: Mr. GALLEG0, Ms. SLOTKIN, Ms. UNDERWOOD, Mr. MRVAN, Mr. SABLON, Ms. BROWNLEY, Ms. LOFGREN, Mr. SWALWELL, Mr. PAPPAS, Ms. TITUS, Mr. FITZPATRICK, Ms. KAPTUR, Mr. MOULTON, Mr. SCHIFF, Mr. TRONE, Ms. STANSBURY, Mr. ALLRED, Mr. LEVIN of California, Mr. RASKIN, Mr. LAMB, Mr. MALINOWSKI, Ms. DELBENE, Mr. KILMER, Ms. MANNING, Mr. COSTA, Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida, Mr. ELLZEY, Mr. WELCH, Mr. SOTO, Mr. RYAN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS, Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia, Mr. CASTEN, Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK, Mr. RUIZ, Mr. ROUZER, Mr. PETERS, and Mrs. LURIA

JUNE 22, 2022

Reported from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs; committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed

# **A BILL**

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the mental health care provided by 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; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the  
 5 “Support The Resiliency of Our Nation’s Great Veterans  
 6 Act of 2022” or the “STRONG Veterans Act of 2022”.

7 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for  
 8 this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—TRAINING TO SUPPORT VETERANS’ MENTAL HEALTH

Sec. 101. Mental health and suicide prevention outreach to minority veterans  
 and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.

Sec. 102. Expansion of Vet Center workforce.

Sec. 103. Expansion of mental health training for Department of Veterans Af-  
 fairs.

Sec. 104. Expansion of scholarships and loan repayment programs for mental  
 health providers.

TITLE II—VETERANS CRISIS LINE

Sec. 201. Veterans Crisis Line.

Subtitle A—Veterans Crisis Line Training and Quality Management

Sec. 211. Staff training.

Sec. 212. Quality review and management.

Sec. 213. Guidance for high-risk callers.

Sec. 214. Oversight of training of social service assistants and clarification of  
 job responsibilities.

Subtitle B—Pilot Programs and Research on Veterans Crisis Line

Sec. 221. Pilot programs.

Sec. 222. Authorization of appropriations for research on effectiveness and op-  
 portunities for improvement of Veterans Crisis Line.

Subtitle C—Transition of Crisis Line Number

Sec. 231. Feedback on transition of crisis line number.

TITLE III—OUTREACH TO VETERANS

Sec. 301. Solid Start program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 302. Designation of Buddy Check Week by Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Sec. 303. Improvements to Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

Sec. 304. Department of Veterans Affairs Governors Challenge Program.

## TITLE IV—MENTAL HEALTH CARE DELIVERY

- Sec. 401. Expansion of peer specialist support program of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 402. Expansion of Vet Center services.
- Sec. 403. Eligibility for mental health services.
- Sec. 404. Mental health consultations.

## TITLE V—RESEARCH

- Sec. 501. Veterans integration to academic leadership program of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 502. Improvement of sleep disorder care furnished by Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 503. Study on inpatient mental health and substance use care from Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 504. Study on treatment from Department of Veterans Affairs for co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders.
- Sec. 505. Study on workload of suicide prevention teams of Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 506. Expansion of suicide prevention and mental health research.
- Sec. 507. Study on mental health and suicide prevention support for military families.
- Sec. 508. Research on brain health.
- Sec. 509. Study on efficacy of clinical and at-home resources for post-traumatic stress disorder.

# 1   **TITLE I—TRAINING TO SUPPORT** 2       **VETERANS' MENTAL HEALTH**

## 3   **SEC. 101. MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION** 4                   **OUTREACH TO MINORITY VETERANS AND** 5                   **AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE VET-** 6                   **ERANS.**

7       (a) STAFFING REQUIREMENT.—Beginning not later  
 8 than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,  
 9 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that each  
 10 medical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs has  
 11 no fewer than one full-time employee whose responsibility  
 12 is serving as a minority veteran coordinator.

1       (b) TRAINING.—Not later than 180 days after the  
2 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in con-  
3 sultation with the Indian Health Service and the Director  
4 of the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of  
5 the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall ensure that all  
6 minority veteran coordinators receive training in delivery  
7 of culturally appropriate mental health and suicide preven-  
8 tion services to American Indian and Alaska Native vet-  
9 erans, especially with respect to the identified populations  
10 and tribes within the coordinators' catchment areas.

11       (c) COORDINATION WITH SUICIDE PREVENTION CO-  
12 ORDINATORS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of  
13 the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation  
14 with the Director of the Office of Mental Health and Sui-  
15 cide Prevention, shall ensure that the suicide prevention  
16 coordinator and minority veteran coordinator of each med-  
17 ical center of the Department have developed and dissemi-  
18 nated to the director of the medical center a written plan  
19 for conducting mental health and suicide prevention out-  
20 reach to all tribes and urban Indian health organizations  
21 within the catchment area of the medical center. Each  
22 such plan shall include for each tribe covered by the  
23 plan—

1           (1) contact information for tribal leadership  
2           and the tribal health facility or Indian Health Serv-  
3           ice facility serving that tribe;

4           (2) a schedule for and list of outreach plans  
5           (including addressing any barriers to accessing De-  
6           partment mental health care);

7           (3) documentation of any conversation with  
8           tribal leaders that may guide culturally appropriate  
9           delivery of mental health care to American Indian or  
10          Alaska Native veterans;

11          (4) documentation of any progress in incor-  
12          porating traditional healing practices into mental  
13          health and suicide prevention protocols and options  
14          available for veterans who are members of such  
15          tribe; and

16          (5) documentation of any coordination among  
17          the Department, the Indian Health Service, urban  
18          Indian health organizations, and the Substance  
19          Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
20          for the purpose of improving suicide prevention ef-  
21          forts tailored to veterans who are members of such  
22          tribe and the provision of culturally competent men-  
23          tal health care to such veterans.

24          (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the en-  
25          actment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the

1 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the  
2 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-  
3 resentatives a report on outreach efforts to minority vet-  
4 erans and American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.  
5 Such report shall include each of the following:

6           (1) The number of minority veteran coordina-  
7           tors within the Department.

8           (2) The number and percentage of minority vet-  
9           eran coordinators who are women.

10          (3) The number and percentage of minority vet-  
11          eran coordinators who are persons of color.

12          (4) The number and percentage of Department  
13          medical centers with minority veteran coordinators.

14          (5) The number and percentage of Department  
15          mental health providers who are enrolled members of  
16          a federally recognized Indian tribe or self-identify as  
17          Native American.

18          (6) The number and percentage of Department  
19          mental health providers who speak a second lan-  
20          guage.

21          (7) A review of the outreach plans developed  
22          and submitted to all Department medical centers for  
23          outreach to American Indian and Alaska Native vet-  
24          erans.

1           (8) A review of mental health care provided an-  
2           nually by the Department to American Indian and  
3           Alaska Native veterans for the past three years, in-  
4           cluding number of appointments, and an assessment  
5           of any barriers to providing this care.

6   **SEC. 102. EXPANSION OF VET CENTER WORKFORCE.**

7           (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the  
8           date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
9           erans Affairs shall hire an additional 100 full-time equiva-  
10          lent employees for Vet Centers to bolster the workforce  
11          of Vet Centers and to provide expanded mental health care  
12          to veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and their fam-  
13          ilies through outreach, community access points,  
14          outstations, and Vet Centers.

15          (b) VET CENTER DEFINED.—In this section, the  
16          term “Vet Center” has the meaning given that term in  
17          section 1712A(h) of title 38, United States Code.

18   **SEC. 103. EXPANSION OF MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR**  
19                           **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

20          (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years after  
21          the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of  
22          Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Office of Men-  
23          tal Health and Suicide Prevention and the Office of Aca-  
24          demic Affiliations, shall add an additional 500 paid trainee



1 slots in covered mental health disciplines to the workforce  
2 of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

3 (b) COVERED MENTAL HEALTH DISCIPLINES DE-  
4 FINED.—In this section, the term “covered mental health  
5 disciplines” means psychiatry, psychology, advanced prac-  
6 tice nursing (with a focus on mental health or substance  
7 use disorder), social work, licensed professional mental  
8 health counseling, and marriage and family therapy.

9 **SEC. 104. EXPANSION OF SCHOLARSHIPS AND LOAN REPAY-**  
10 **MENT PROGRAMS FOR MENTAL HEALTH PRO-**  
11 **VIDERS.**

12 (a) EXPANSION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONAL SCHOL-  
13 ARSHIP PROGRAM.—Beginning in academic year 2022,  
14 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall include not fewer  
15 than an additional (as compared to academic year 2021)  
16 50 awards per academic year under the Department of  
17 Veterans Affairs Health Professional Scholarship Pro-  
18 gram under subchapter II of chapter 76 of title 38, United  
19 States Code, for applicants otherwise eligible for such pro-  
20 gram who are pursuing degrees or training in mental  
21 health disciplines, including advanced practice nursing  
22 (with a focus on mental health or substance use disorder),  
23 psychology, and social work.

24 (b) EXPANSION OF EDUCATION DEBT REDUCTION  
25 PROGRAM.—

1           (1) IN GENERAL.—Beginning in fiscal year  
2       2022, the Secretary shall provide not fewer than an  
3       additional (as compared to fiscal year 2021) 200  
4       debt reduction awards per year under the Depart-  
5       ment of Veterans Affairs Education Debt Reduction  
6       Program under subchapter VII of chapter 76 of title  
7       38, United States Code, to be used to recruit mental  
8       health professionals to the Department of Veterans  
9       Affairs in disciplines that include psychiatry, psy-  
10      chology, advanced practice nursing (with a focus on  
11      mental health or substance use disorder), and social  
12      work.

13           (2) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—  
14      There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-  
15      retary of Veterans Affairs \$8,000,000 per year to  
16      carry out the additional awards under paragraph  
17      (1).

18           (c) OUTREACH.—

19           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
20      after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
21      retary shall develop a public awareness campaign to  
22      encourage veterans and mental health professionals  
23      to choose the Department for their mental health ca-  
24      reer.

1 (2) ELEMENTS.—The campaign required under  
2 paragraph (1)—

3 (A) shall advertise the paid trainee, schol-  
4 arship, and loan repayment opportunities of-  
5 fered by the Department; and

6 (B) may highlight the new graduate med-  
7 ical education residencies available at the De-  
8 partment for medical students entering resi-  
9 dency.

## 10 **TITLE II—VETERANS CRISIS** 11 **LINE**

### 12 **SEC. 201. VETERANS CRISIS LINE.**

13 In this title, the term “Veterans Crisis Line” means  
14 the toll-free hotline for veterans established under section  
15 1720F(h) of title 38, United States Code.

## 16 **Subtitle A—Veterans Crisis Line** 17 **Training and Quality Management**

### 18 **SEC. 211. STAFF TRAINING.**

19 (a) REVIEW OF TRAINING FOR VETERANS CRISIS  
20 LINE CALL RESPONDERS.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
22 Affairs shall enter into an agreement with an orga-  
23 nization outside the Department of Veterans Affairs  
24 to review the training for Veterans Crisis Line call  
25 responders on assisting callers in crisis.

1           (2) COMPLETION OF REVIEW.—The review con-  
2           ducted under paragraph (1) shall be completed not  
3           later than one year after the date of the enactment  
4           of this Act.

5           (3) ELEMENTS OF REVIEW.—The review con-  
6           ducted under paragraph (1) shall consist of a review  
7           of the training provided by the Department on sub-  
8           jects including risk assessment, lethal means assess-  
9           ment, substance use and overdose risk assessment,  
10          safety planning, referrals to care, supervisory con-  
11          sultation, and emergency dispatch.

12          (4) UPDATE OF TRAINING.—If any deficiencies  
13          in the training for Veterans Crisis Line call respond-  
14          ers are found pursuant to the review under para-  
15          graph (1), the Secretary shall update such training  
16          and associated standards of practice to correct those  
17          deficiencies not later than one year after the comple-  
18          tion of the review.

19          (b) RETRAINING GUIDELINES FOR VETERANS CRISIS  
20          LINE CALL RESPONDERS.—

21               (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
22               after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
23               retary shall develop guidelines on retraining and  
24               quality management for when a Veterans Crisis Line  
25               call responder has an adverse event or when a qual-

1       ity review check by a supervisor of such a call re-  
2       sponder denotes that the call responder needs im-  
3       provement.

4               (2) ELEMENTS OF GUIDELINES.—The guide-  
5       lines developed under paragraph (1) shall specify the  
6       subjects and quantity of retraining recommended  
7       and how supervisors should implement increased use  
8       of silent monitoring or other performance review  
9       mechanisms.

10 **SEC. 212. QUALITY REVIEW AND MANAGEMENT.**

11       (a) MONITORING OF CALLS ON VETERANS CRISIS  
12       LINE.—

13               (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans  
14       Affairs shall require that not fewer than two calls  
15       per month for each Veterans Crisis Line call re-  
16       sponder be subject to supervisory silent monitoring,  
17       which is used to monitor the quality of conduct by  
18       such call responder during the call.

19               (2) BENCHMARKS.—The Secretary shall estab-  
20       lish benchmarks for requirements and performance  
21       of Veterans Crisis Line call responders on super-  
22       visory silent monitored calls.

23               (3) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—Not less frequently  
24       than quarterly, the Secretary shall submit to the Of-  
25       fice of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the

1 Department of Veterans Affairs a report on occur-  
2 rence and outcomes of supervisory silent monitoring  
3 of calls on the Veterans Crisis Line.

4 (b) QUALITY MANAGEMENT PROCESSES FOR VET-  
5 ERANS CRISIS LINE.—Not later than one year after the  
6 date of the enactment of this Act, the leadership for the  
7 Veterans Crisis Line, in partnership with the Office of  
8 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention of the Department  
9 and the National Center for Patient Safety of the Depart-  
10 ment, shall establish quality management processes and  
11 expectations for staff of the Veterans Crisis Line, includ-  
12 ing with respect to reporting of adverse events and close  
13 calls.

14 (c) ANNUAL COMMON CAUSE ANALYSIS FOR CALL-  
15 ERS TO VETERANS CRISIS LINE WHO DIE BY SUICIDE.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not less frequently than an-  
17 nually, the Secretary shall perform a common cause  
18 analysis for all identified callers to the Veterans Cri-  
19 sis Line that died by suicide during the one-year pe-  
20 riod preceding the conduct of the analysis before the  
21 caller received contact with emergency services and  
22 in which the Veterans Crisis Line was the last point  
23 of contact.

24 (2) SUBMITTAL OF RESULTS.—The Secretary  
25 shall submit to the Office of Mental Health and Sui-

1        cide Prevention of the Department the results of  
2        each analysis conducted under paragraph (1).

3            (3) APPLICATION OF THEMES OR LESSONS.—

4        The Secretary shall apply any themes or lessons  
5        learned under an analysis under paragraph (1) to  
6        updating training and standards of practice for staff  
7        of the Veterans Crisis Line.

8   **SEC. 213. GUIDANCE FOR HIGH-RISK CALLERS.**

9            (a) DEVELOPMENT OF ENHANCED GUIDANCE AND  
10        PROCEDURES FOR RESPONSE TO CALLS RELATED TO  
11        SUBSTANCE USE AND OVERDOSE RISK.—Not later than  
12        one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the  
13        Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation with na-  
14        tional experts within the Department of Veterans Affairs  
15        on substance use disorder and overdose, shall—

16            (1) develop enhanced guidance and procedures  
17        to respond to calls to the Veterans Crisis Line re-  
18        lated to substance use and overdose risk;

19            (2) update training materials for staff of the  
20        Veterans Crisis Line in response to such enhanced  
21        guidance and procedures; and

22            (3) update criteria for monitoring compliance  
23        with such enhanced guidance and procedures.

24            (b) REVIEW AND IMPROVEMENT OF STANDARDS FOR  
25        EMERGENCY DISPATCH.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall—

(A) review the current emergency dispatch standard operating procedure of the Veterans Crisis Line to identify any additions to such procedure to strengthen communication regarding—

(i) emergency dispatch for disconnected callers; and

(ii) the role of social service assistants in requesting emergency dispatch and recording such dispatches; and

(B) update such procedure to include the additions identified under subparagraph (A).

(2) TRAINING.—The Secretary shall ensure that all staff of the Veterans Crisis Line are trained on all updates made under paragraph (1)(B) to the emergency dispatch standard operating procedure of the Veterans Crisis Line.

**SEC. 214. OVERSIGHT OF TRAINING OF SOCIAL SERVICE ASSISTANTS AND CLARIFICATION OF JOB RESPONSIBILITIES.**

Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—



1           (1) establish oversight mechanisms to ensure  
2           that social service assistants and supervisory social  
3           service assistants working with the Veterans Crisis  
4           Line are appropriately trained and implementing  
5           guidance of the Department regarding the Veterans  
6           Crisis Line; and

7           (2) refine standard operating procedures to de-  
8           lineate roles and responsibilities for all levels of su-  
9           pervisory social service assistants working with the  
10          Veterans Crisis Line.

## 11       **Subtitle B—Pilot Programs and** 12       **Research on Veterans Crisis Line**

### 13       **SEC. 221. PILOT PROGRAMS.**

14       (a) EXTENDED SAFETY PLANNING PILOT PROGRAM  
15       FOR VETERANS CRISIS LINE.—

16           (1) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than  
17           180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,  
18           the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a  
19           pilot program to determine whether a lengthier,  
20           templated safety plan used in clinical settings could  
21           be applied in call centers for the Veterans Crisis  
22           Line.

23           (2) BRIEFING.—Not later than two years after  
24           the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
25           shall provide to Congress a briefing on the findings

1 of the Secretary under the pilot program conducted  
2 under paragraph (1), which shall include any rec-  
3 ommendations of the Secretary with respect to the  
4 continuation or discontinuation of the pilot program.

5 (b) CRISIS LINE FACILITATION PILOT PROGRAM.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than  
7 one year after the date of the enactment of this Act,  
8 the Secretary shall carry out a pilot program on the  
9 use of crisis line facilitation to increase use of the  
10 Veterans Crisis Line among high-risk veterans.

11 (2) BRIEFING.—Not later than two years after  
12 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary  
13 shall provide to Congress a briefing on the findings  
14 of the Secretary under the pilot program under  
15 paragraph (1), including any recommendations of  
16 the Secretary with respect to the continuation or dis-  
17 continuation of the pilot program.

18 (3) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

19 (A) The term “crisis line facilitation”, with  
20 respect to a high-risk veteran, means the pres-  
21 entation by a therapist of psychoeducational in-  
22 formation about the Veterans Crisis Line and a  
23 discussion of the perceived barriers and  
24 facilitators to future use of the Veterans Crisis  
25 Line for the veteran, which culminates in the

1           veteran calling the Veterans Crisis Line with  
2           the therapist to provide firsthand experiences  
3           that may counter negative impressions of the  
4           Veterans Crisis Line.

5                   (B) The term “high-risk veteran” means a  
6           veteran receiving inpatient mental health care  
7           following a suicidal crisis.

8   **SEC. 222. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR RE-**  
9                   **SEARCH ON EFFECTIVENESS AND OPPORTU-**  
10                  **NITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT OF VETERANS**  
11                  **CRISIS LINE.**

12       There is authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-  
13   retary of Veterans Affairs for fiscal years 2022 and 2023,  
14   a total of \$5,000,000 for the Mental Illness Research,  
15   Education, and Clinical Centers of the Department of Vet-  
16   erans Affairs to conduct research on the effectiveness of  
17   the Veterans Crisis Line and areas for improvement for  
18   the Veterans Crisis Line. Amounts made available pursu-  
19   ant to the authorization of appropriations under this sec-  
20   tion shall remain available until September 30, 2024.

**Subtitle C—Transition of Crisis**  
**Line Number**

**SEC. 231. FEEDBACK ON TRANSITION OF CRISIS LINE NUM-**  
**BER.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall solicit feedback from veterans service organizations on how to conduct outreach to members of the Armed Forces, veterans, their family members, and other members of the military and veterans community on the move to 988 as the new, national three-digit suicide and mental health crisis hotline, which is expected to be implemented by July 2022, to minimize confusion and ensure veterans are aware of their options for reaching the Veterans Crisis Line.

(b) NONAPPLICATION OF FACA.—The Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.) shall not apply to any feedback solicited under subsection (a).

(c) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION DEFINED.—In this section, the term “veterans service organization” means an organization recognized by the Secretary for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

# **TITLE III—OUTREACH TO VETERANS**

## **SEC. 301. SOLID START PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter:

### **“SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES**

#### **“§ 6320. Solid Start program**

“(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out a program, to be known as the ‘Solid Start program’, under which the Secretary shall—

“(1) build the capacity of the Department to efficiently and effectively respond to the queries and needs of veterans who have recently separated from the Armed Forces; and

“(2) systemically integrate and coordinate efforts to assist veterans, including efforts—

“(A) to proactively reach out to newly separated veterans to inform them of their eligibility for programs of and benefits provided by the Department; and

“(B) to connect veterans in crisis to resources that address their immediate needs.

1       “(b) ACTIVITIES OF THE SOLID START PROGRAM.—

2   (1) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of  
3   Defense, shall carry out the Solid Start program of the  
4   Department by—

5       “(A) collecting up-to-date contact information  
6       during transition classes or separation counseling for  
7       all members of the Armed Forces who are sepa-  
8       rating from the Armed Forces, while explaining the  
9       existence and purpose of the Solid Start program;

10       “(B) calling each veteran, regardless of separa-  
11       tion type or characterization of service, three times  
12       within the first year after separation of the veteran  
13       from the Armed Forces;

14       “(C) providing information about the Solid  
15       Start program on the website of the Department  
16       and in materials of the Department, especially tran-  
17       sition booklets and other resources;

18       “(D) ensuring calls are truly tailored to the  
19       needs of each veteran’s unique situation by con-  
20       ducting quality assurance tests;

21       “(E) prioritizing outreach to veterans who have  
22       accessed mental health resources prior to separation  
23       from the Armed Forces;

1           “(F) providing women veterans with informa-  
2           tion that is tailored to their specific health care and  
3           benefit needs;

4           “(G) as feasible, providing information on ac-  
5           cess to State and local resources, including Vet Cen-  
6           ters and veterans service organizations; and

7           “(H) gathering and analyzing data assessing  
8           the effectiveness of the Solid Start program.

9           “(2) The Secretary, in coordination with the Sec-  
10          retary of Defense, may carry out the Solid Start program  
11          by—

12           “(A) encouraging members of the Armed  
13          Forces who are transitioning to civilian life to au-  
14          thorize alternate points of contact who can be  
15          reached should the member be unavailable during  
16          the first year following the separation of the member  
17          from the Armed Forces;

18           “(B) following up missed phone calls with tai-  
19          lored mailings to ensure the veteran still receives  
20          similar information; and

21           “(C) striving to reach out to veterans who sepa-  
22          rated prior to the initiation of the Solid Start pro-  
23          gram to provide similar services to those veterans, as  
24          feasible.

25          “(3) In this subsection:

1           “(A) The term ‘Vet Center’ has the meaning  
2           given that term in section 1712A(h) of this title.

3           “(B) The term ‘veterans service organization’  
4           means an organization recognized by the Secretary  
5           for the representation of veterans under section  
6           5902 of this title.

7           “(c) OBLIGATIONS OF AMOUNTS.—Subject to the  
8           availability of appropriations, the Secretary may not, in  
9           a fiscal year, obligate an amount to carry out the Solid  
10          Start program that is less than the total amount obligated  
11          in the previous fiscal year to carry out the program, unless  
12          the Secretary determines that increased efficiencies of the  
13          program warrant the obligation of a lesser amount.”.

14          (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Chapter 63 of  
15          such title, as amended by subsection (a), is further amend-  
16          ed—

17                 (1) by inserting before section 6301 the fol-  
18          lowing:

19          **“Subchapter I—Outreach Services Program”;**  
20          and

21                 (2) in sections 6301, 6303, 6304, 6305, 6306,  
22          and 6307, by striking “this chapter” each place it  
23          appears and inserting “this subchapter”.

24          (c) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The table of sections  
25          at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended—



1 (1) by inserting before the item relating to sec-  
 2 tion 6301 the following new item:

“SUBCHAPTER I—OUTREACH SERVICES PROGRAM”;

3 and

4 (2) by adding at the end the following new  
 5 items:

“SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

“6320. Solid Start program.”.

6 **SEC. 302. DESIGNATION OF BUDDY CHECK WEEK BY SEC-**  
 7 **RETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
 9 shall designate one week each year to organize outreach  
 10 events and educate veterans on how to conduct peer  
 11 wellness checks, which shall be known as “Buddy Check  
 12 Week”.

13 (b) EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—During Buddy Check Week,  
 15 the Secretary, in consultation with organizations  
 16 that represent veterans, nonprofits that serve vet-  
 17 erans, mental health experts, members of the Armed  
 18 Forces, and such other entities and individuals as  
 19 the Secretary considers appropriate, shall collaborate  
 20 with organizations that represent veterans to provide  
 21 educational opportunities for veterans to learn how  
 22 to conduct peer wellness checks.

1           (2) TRAINING MATTERS.—As part of the edu-  
2           cational opportunities provided under paragraph (1),  
3           the Secretary shall provide the following:

4                   (A) A script for veterans to use to conduct  
5                   peer wellness checks that includes information  
6                   on appropriate referrals to resources veterans  
7                   might need.

8                   (B) Online and in-person training, as ap-  
9                   propriate, on how to conduct a peer wellness  
10                  check.

11                  (C) Opportunities for members of organi-  
12                  zations that represent veterans to learn how to  
13                  train individuals to conduct peer wellness  
14                  checks.

15                  (D) Training for veterans participating in  
16                  Buddy Check Week on how to transfer a phone  
17                  call directly to the Veterans Crisis Line.

18                  (E) Resiliency training for veterans partici-  
19                  pating in Buddy Check Week on handling a vet-  
20                  eran in crisis.

21           (3) ONLINE MATERIALS.—All training materials  
22           provided under the educational opportunities under  
23           paragraph (1) shall be made publicly available on a  
24           website of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 (c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary, in collaboration with  
2 organizations that represent veterans, may conduct out-  
3 reach regarding educational opportunities under sub-  
4 section (b) at—

5 (1) public events where many veterans are ex-  
6 pected to congregate;

7 (2) meetings of organizations that represent  
8 veterans;

9 (3) facilities of the Department; and

10 (4) such other locations as the Secretary, in col-  
11 laboration with organizations that represent vet-  
12 erans, considers appropriate.

13 (d) VETERANS CRISIS LINE PLAN.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall ensure  
15 that a plan exists for handling the potential increase  
16 in the number of calls into the Veterans Crisis Line  
17 that may occur during Buddy Check Week.

18 (2) SUBMITTAL OF PLAN.—The head of the  
19 Veterans Crisis Line shall submit to the Secretary a  
20 plan for how to handle excess calls during Buddy  
21 Check Week, which may include the following:

22 (A) Additional hours for staff.

23 (B) The use of a backup call center.

24 (C) Any other plan to ensure that calls  
25 from veterans in crisis are being answered in a

1           timely manner by an individual trained at the  
2           same level as a Veterans Crisis Line responder.

3       (e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

4           (1) The term “organization that represents vet-  
5           erans” means an organization recognized by the Sec-  
6           retary for the representation of veterans under sec-  
7           tion 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

8           (2) The term “veteran” has the meaning given  
9           that term in section 101 of such title.

10          (3) The term “Veterans Crisis Line” means the  
11          toll-free hotline for veterans provided by the Sec-  
12          retary under section 1720F(h) of such title.

13 **SEC. 303. IMPROVEMENTS TO VETERANS JUSTICE OUT-**  
14 **REACH PROGRAM.**

15       (a) OUTREACH REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary of  
16 Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach regarding the Vet-  
17 erans Justice Outreach Program to justice-involved vet-  
18 erans, military and veterans service organizations, and rel-  
19 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice community, in-  
20 cluding officials from local law enforcement, court, and jail  
21 systems and others as determined appropriate by the Sec-  
22 retary. Such outreach—

23           (1) shall be designed—

24               (A) to spread awareness and under-  
25           standing of the Program;

1 (B) to spread awareness and under-  
2 standing of veteran eligibility for the Program,  
3 including the eligibility of veterans who were  
4 discharged from service in the Armed Forces  
5 under conditions other than honorable; and

6 (C) to improve the identification of justice-  
7 involved veterans; and

8 (2) may be conducted in person, virtually, or  
9 through other means, including by the dissemination  
10 of informational materials and contact information.

11 (b) STRATEGIC PLAN.—The Secretary of Veterans  
12 Affairs shall develop a strategic plan for the Veterans Jus-  
13 tice Outreach Program. In developing such plan, the Sec-  
14 retary shall conduct—

15 (1) an assessment of barriers to working with  
16 justice-involved veterans in rural, remote, and under-  
17 served areas, including potential steps to address  
18 such barriers; and

19 (2) a workforce gap analysis for the Program.

20 (c) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF VJO SPECIALISTS.—

21 (1) INCREASE.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-  
22 fairs shall increase the number of Veterans Justice  
23 Outreach specialists responsible for supporting jus-  
24 tice-involved veterans in rural, remote, or under-  
25 served areas, including areas located far from De-

1 department of Veterans Affairs medical centers, as de-  
2 termined by the Secretary, through—

3 (A) the hiring of additional Veterans Jus-  
4 tice Outreach specialists;

5 (B) the reallocation of existing Veterans  
6 Justice Outreach specialists; or

7 (C) such other means as may be deter-  
8 mined appropriate by the Secretary.

9 (2) DETERMINATION.—The Secretary shall de-  
10 termine the number of Veterans Justice Outreach  
11 specialists required, and the locations of such spe-  
12 cialists, under paragraph (1) by taking into ac-  
13 count—

14 (A) such number and locations needed to  
15 achieve the mission and strategic goals of the  
16 Veterans Justice Outreach Program;

17 (B) any gaps in the workforce of the Pro-  
18 gram, including such gaps identified pursuant  
19 to subsection (b)(2); and

20 (C) strategies to address such gaps.

21 (3) USE OF TECHNOLOGY.—In carrying out  
22 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall consider the use  
23 of virtual technology.

24 (d) PERFORMANCE GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION

25 PLANS.—

1           (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Vet-  
2       erans Affairs shall establish performance goals and  
3       implementation plans for—

4                   (A) the Veterans Justice Outreach Pro-  
5       gram;

6                   (B) Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists;  
7       and

8                   (C) providing support for research regard-  
9       ing justice-involved veterans.

10          (2) CONSISTENCY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN.—

11       The Secretary shall ensure that the performance  
12       goals and implementation plans under paragraph (1)  
13       are consistent with the strategic plan under sub-  
14       section (b) and include—

15                   (A) qualitative and quantitative milestones,  
16       measures, and metrics, and associated timelines  
17       for completion of the plans under paragraph (1)  
18       and barriers to such completion;

19                   (B) an identification of relevant staff; and

20                   (C) an estimate of resource needs and  
21       sources.

22          (3) PERFORMANCE DATA.—The Secretary shall  
23       establish a process to regularly collect and analyze  
24       performance data to assess the efficiency and effec-

1        tiveness of implementing the plans under paragraph  
2        (1).

3        (e) TRAINING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary shall  
4        ensure that all Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists re-  
5        ceive training not less frequently than annually on—

6            (1) best practices for identifying and con-  
7        ducting outreach to justice-involved veterans and rel-  
8        evant stakeholders in the criminal justice commu-  
9        nity; and

10          (2) veteran eligibility for the Veterans Justice  
11        Outreach Program, including with respect to consist-  
12        ently communicating changes regarding eligibility  
13        (including through the use of a script or other ref-  
14        erence materials).

15        (f) REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION.—

16          (1) FIRST REPORT.—Not later than one year  
17        after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
18        retary shall submit to Congress a report on the fol-  
19        lowing:

20            (A) An assessment of implementing sub-  
21        section (c), including—

22                  (i) strategies to increase Veterans  
23                  Justice Outreach specialists responsible for  
24                  supporting justice-involved veterans in  
25                  rural, remote, or underserved areas; and



1 (ii) the progress of the Secretary in  
2 addressing gaps in the workforce of the  
3 Veterans Justice Outreach Program identi-  
4 fied pursuant to paragraph (2) of such  
5 subsection.

6 (B) The performance goals and implemen-  
7 tation plans established under subsection  
8 (d)(1).

9 (2) SUBSEQUENT REPORT.—Not later than  
10 three years after the date on which the first report  
11 is submitted under paragraph (1), the Secretary  
12 shall submit to Congress a report on the progress of  
13 the Secretary in meeting the performance goals and  
14 carrying out activities under the implementation  
15 plans established under subsection (d)(1).

16 (g) REPORT ON VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS.—  
17 Not later than one year after the date of the enactment  
18 of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the Attor-  
19 ney General, shall submit to Congress a report on the en-  
20 gagement of the Department of Veterans Affairs with vet-  
21 erans treatment courts, including—

22 (1) the availability and efficacy of veterans  
23 treatment courts in meeting the needs of justice-in-  
24 volved veterans;

1           (2) best practices for Department of Veterans  
2       Affairs staff and justice-involved veterans in working  
3       with veterans treatment courts; and

4           (3) the ability of justice-involved veterans to ac-  
5       cess veterans treatment courts, including any bar-  
6       riers that exist to increasing such access.

7       (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

8           (1) The term “justice-involved veteran” means  
9       a veteran with active, ongoing, or recent contact  
10      with some component of a local criminal justice sys-  
11      tem.

12          (2) The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Pro-  
13      gram” means the program through which the De-  
14      partment of Veterans Affairs identifies justice-in-  
15      volved veterans and provides such veterans with ac-  
16      cess to Department services.

17          (3) The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Spe-  
18      cialist” means an employee of the Department of  
19      Veterans Affairs who serves as a liaison between the  
20      Department and the local criminal justice system on  
21      behalf of a justice-involved veteran.

22          (4) The term “veterans treatment court” means  
23      a State or local court that is participating in the vet-  
24      erans treatment court program (as defined in section

1       2991(i)(1) of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe  
 2       Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3797aa(i)(1))).

3   **SEC. 304. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS GOV-**  
 4       **ERNORS CHALLENGE PROGRAM.**

5       The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may enter into  
 6       agreements with States, territories, and American Indian  
 7       and Alaska Native tribes for the development and imple-  
 8       mentation of veteran suicide prevention proposals through  
 9       the Governors Challenge Program.

10       **TITLE IV—MENTAL HEALTH**  
 11       **CARE DELIVERY**

12   **SEC. 401. EXPANSION OF PEER SPECIALIST SUPPORT PRO-**  
 13       **GRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
 14       **FAIRS.**

15       (a) EXPANSION.—Section 506 of the VA MISSION  
 16       Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note)  
 17       is amended—

18               (1) by redesignating subsections (d) through (f)  
 19       as subsections (e) through (g);

20               (2) in subsection (a), by adding at the end the  
 21       following new sentence: “Each such peer specialist  
 22       shall be a full-time employee whose primary function  
 23       is to serve as a peer specialist and shall be in addi-  
 24       tion to all other employees of such medical center.”;

1           (3) in the heading of subsection (b), by striking  
2       “TIMEFRAME” and inserting “INITIAL TIME-  
3       FRAME”;

4           (4) in subsection (c)—

5               (A) in the heading, by striking “SELEC-  
6       TION” and inserting “INITIAL SELECTION”; and

7               (B) in paragraph (1), by striking “The  
8       Secretary shall” and inserting “In establishing  
9       the program at initial locations, the Secretary  
10      shall”;

11          (5) by inserting after subsection (c) the fol-  
12      lowing new subsection:

13      “(d) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION OF PROGRAM; SE-  
14      LECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

15           “(1) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION.—The Sec-  
16      retary shall make permanent and expand the pro-  
17      gram to additional medical centers of the Depart-  
18      ment as follows:

19               “(A) As of the date of the enactment of  
20      the STRONG Veterans Act of 2021, the Sec-  
21      retary shall make such program permanent at  
22      each medical center participating in the pro-  
23      gram on the day before such date of enactment.

24               “(B) During the seven-year period fol-  
25      lowing such date of enactment, the Secretary

1           shall expand the program to an additional 25  
2           medical centers per year until the program is  
3           carried out at each medical center of the De-  
4           partment.

5           “(2) SELECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

6           In selecting medical centers for the expansion of the  
7           program under paragraph (1)(B), until such time as  
8           each medical center of the Department is partici-  
9           pating in the program by establishing not fewer than  
10          two peer specialists at the medical center, the Sec-  
11          retary shall prioritize medical centers in the fol-  
12          lowing areas:

13                   “(A) Rural areas and other areas that are  
14                   underserved by the Department.

15                   “(B) Areas that are not in close proximity  
16                   to an active duty military installation.

17                   “(C) Areas representing different geo-  
18                   graphic locations, such as census tracts estab-  
19                   lished by the Bureau of the Census.”;

20           (6) in subsection (e), as redesignated by para-  
21          graph (1)—

22                   (A) in the heading, by striking “GENDER-  
23                   SPECIFIC SERVICES” and inserting “CONSIDER-  
24                   ATIONS FOR HIRING PEER SPECIALISTS”;

1 (B) in the matter preceding paragraph (1),  
2 by striking “location selected under subsection  
3 (c)” and inserting “medical center”;

4 (C) in paragraph (1), by striking “and” at  
5 the end; and

6 (D) by striking paragraph (2) and insert-  
7 ing the following new paragraphs:

8 “(2) female peer specialists are hired and made  
9 available to support female veterans who are treated  
10 at each medical center; and

11 “(3) to the extent practical, peer specialists are  
12 hired in demographic percentages that reflect the ra-  
13 cial and ethnic demographic percentages of the over-  
14 all veterans population.”; and

15 (7) by amending subsection (g), as redesignated  
16 by paragraph (1), to read as follows:

17 “(g) REPORTS.—

18 “(1) PERIODIC REPORTS.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one  
20 year after the date of the enactment of the  
21 STRONG Veterans Act of 2021, and annually  
22 thereafter for five years, the Secretary shall  
23 submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs  
24 of the House of Representatives and the Senate

1 a report on the program, including the expansion of the program under subsection (d)(1).

3 “(B) ELEMENTS.—Each report under subparagraph (A) shall include, with respect to the one-year period preceding the submission of the report, the following:

7 “(i) The findings and conclusions of the Secretary with respect to the program.

9 “(ii) An assessment of the benefits of the program to veterans and family members of veterans.

12 “(iii) An assessment of the effectiveness of peer specialists in engaging under subsection (f) with health care providers in the community and veterans served by such providers.

17 “(iv) The name and location of each medical center where new peer specialists were hired.

20 “(v) The number of new peer specialists hired at each medical center pursuant to this section and the total number of peer specialists within the Department hired pursuant to this section.

1                   “(vi) An assessment of any barriers  
2                   confronting the recruitment, training, or  
3                   retention of peer specialists.

4                   “(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than one year  
5                   after the Secretary determines that the program is  
6                   being carried out at each medical center of the De-  
7                   partment, the Secretary shall submit to the Commit-  
8                   tees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Represent-  
9                   atives and the Senate a report notifying such com-  
10                  mittees of such determination.”.

11                  (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
12                  authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Vet-  
13                  erans Affairs to implement section 506 of the VA MIS-  
14                  SION Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 1701  
15                  note), as amended by subsection (a), the following  
16                  amounts:

- 17                   (1) \$3,600,000 for fiscal year 2022.  
18                   (2) \$7,200,000 for fiscal year 2023.  
19                   (3) \$10,800,000 for fiscal year 2024.  
20                   (4) \$14,400,000 for fiscal year 2025.  
21                   (5) \$18,000,000 for fiscal year 2026.  
22                   (6) \$21,600,000 for fiscal year 2027.  
23                   (7) \$25,000,000 for fiscal year 2028.



1 **SEC. 402. EXPANSION OF VET CENTER SERVICES.**

2 (a) VETERANS AND MEMBERS USING EDUCATIONAL  
3 ASSISTANCE BENEFITS.—Section 1712A of title 38,  
4 United States Code, is amended—

5 (1) by striking “clauses (i) through (vi)” both  
6 places it appears and inserting “clauses (i) through  
7 (vii)”;

8 (2) by striking “in clause (vii)” both places it  
9 appears and inserting “in clause (viii)”;

10 (3) in subsection (a)(1)(C)—

11 (A) by redesignating clause (vii) as clause  
12 (viii); and

13 (B) by inserting after clause (vi) the fol-  
14 lowing new clause:

15 “(vii) Any veteran or member of the Armed  
16 Forces pursuing a course of education using covered  
17 educational assistance benefits.”; and

18 (4) in subsection (h), by adding at the end the  
19 following new paragraph:

20 “(6) The term ‘covered educational assistance  
21 benefits’ means educational assistance benefits pro-  
22 vided pursuant to—

23 “(A) chapter 30, 31, 32, or 33 of this title;

24 “(B) chapter 1606 or 1607 of title 10;

1 “(C) section 116 of the Harry W. Colmery  
2 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017  
3 (Public Law 115–48; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note); or  
4 “(D) section 8006 of the American Rescue  
5 Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law 117–2; 38  
6 U.S.C. 3001 note prec.).”.

7 (b) GAO REPORT.—Not later than one year after the  
8 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General  
9 of the United States shall submit to the Committees on  
10 Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the  
11 Senate a report assessing—

12 (1) the mental health needs of veterans pur-  
13 suing a course of education using covered edu-  
14 cational assistance benefits (as defined in section  
15 1712A(h)(6) of title 38, United States Code, as  
16 added by subsection (a)); and

17 (2) the efforts of the Department of Veterans  
18 Affairs to address such mental health needs.

19 **SEC. 403. ELIGIBILITY FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1712A(a)(1) of title 38,  
21 United States Code, as amended by section 402, is further  
22 amended—

23 (1) in subparagraph (A)(ii)—

24 (A) in subclause (I), by striking “and”;

1 (B) in subclause (II), by striking the pe-  
 2 riod at the end and inserting “; and”; and

3 (C) by adding at the end the following:

4 “(III) in the case of a veteran or member  
 5 who died by suicide, to the degree that coun-  
 6 seling furnished to such individual is found to  
 7 aid in coping with the effects of such suicide.”;

8 (2) in subparagraph (B)(i)(II)—

9 (A) in item (aa), by striking “or”;

10 (B) in item (bb), by striking the period at  
 11 the end and inserting “; or”; and

12 (C) by adding at the end the following;

13 “(cc) coping with the effects of a sui-  
 14 cide described in subclause (III) of such  
 15 clause.”; and

16 (3) in subparagraph (C)(vii)—

17 (A) in subclause (I), by striking “or” at  
 18 the end;

19 (B) in subclause (II), by striking the pe-  
 20 riod at the end and inserting “; or”; and

21 (C) by adding at the end the following:

22 “(III) veteran or member of the Armed  
 23 Forces who died by suicide.”.

24 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by  
 25 subsection (a) shall apply with respect to family members

1 of a member or veteran who died by suicide before, on,  
2 or after the date of the enactment of this Act.

3 **SEC. 404. MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATIONS.**

4 (a) MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATIONS FOR VET-  
5 ERANS FILING FOR COMPENSATION.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter VI of chapter 11  
7 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by add-  
8 ing at the end the following new section:

9 **“§ 1167. Mental health consultations**

10 “(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days after the  
11 date on which a veteran submits to the Secretary a claim  
12 for compensation under this chapter for a service-con-  
13 nected disability relating to a mental health diagnosis, the  
14 Secretary shall offer the veteran a mental health consulta-  
15 tion to assess the mental health needs of, and care options  
16 for, the veteran.

17 “(b) AVAILABILITY.—The Secretary shall—

18 “(1) offer a veteran a consultation under sub-  
19 section (a) without regard to any previous denial or  
20 approval of a claim of that veteran for a service-con-  
21 nected disability relating to a mental health diag-  
22 nosis; and

23 “(2) ensure that a veteran offered a mental  
24 health consultation under subsection (a) may elect to  
25 receive such consultation during the one-year period

1       beginning on the date on which the consultation is  
 2       offered or during such longer period beginning on  
 3       such date as the Secretary considers appropriate.

4       “(c) RULE OF CONSTRUCTION.—A consultation pro-  
 5       vided to a veteran under this section shall not be construed  
 6       as a determination that any disability of such veteran is  
 7       service-connected for the purposes of any benefit under the  
 8       laws administered by the Secretary.”.

9               (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
 10       tions at the beginning of chapter 11 of such title is  
 11       amended by adding at the end the following new  
 12       item:

“1167. Mental health consultations.”.

13       (b) MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATIONS FOR VET-  
 14       ERANS ENTERING HOMELESS PROGRAMS OFFICE PRO-  
 15       GRAMS.—

16       (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter VII of chapter  
 17       20 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by  
 18       adding at the end the following new section:

19       **“§ 2068. Mental health consultations**

20       “(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two weeks after  
 21       the date on which a veteran described in subsection (b)  
 22       enters into a program administered by the Homeless Pro-  
 23       grams Office of the Department, the Secretary shall offer  
 24       the veteran a mental health consultation to assess the  
 25       health needs of, and care options for, the veteran.

1       “(b) VETERAN DESCRIBED.—A veteran described in  
 2 this subsection is a veteran to whom a mental health con-  
 3 sultation is not offered or provided through the case man-  
 4 agement services of the program of the Homeless Pro-  
 5 grams Office into which the veteran enters.”.

6           (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-  
 7 tions at the beginning of chapter 20 of such title is  
 8 amended by adding at the end the following new  
 9 item:

“2068. Mental health consultations.”.

## 10                   **TITLE V—RESEARCH**

### 11   **SEC. 501. VETERANS INTEGRATION TO ACADEMIC LEADER-** 12                   **SHIP PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF** 13                   **VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

14       (a) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date  
 15 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans  
 16 Affairs shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Af-  
 17 fairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a  
 18 report on the Veterans Integration to Academic Leader-  
 19 ship program of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The  
 20 report shall include the following:

21           (1) The number of medical centers of the De-  
 22 partment, institutions of higher learning, non-college  
 23 degree programs, and student veterans supported by  
 24 the program, and relevant trends since the program  
 25 began.

1           (2) The staff and resources allocated to the  
2           program, and relevant trends since the program  
3           began.

4           (3) An assessment of the outcomes and effec-  
5           tiveness of the program in—

6                     (A) supporting student veterans;

7                     (B) connecting student veterans to needed  
8           services of the Department or services provided  
9           by non-Department entities;

10                    (C) addressing the mental health needs of  
11           student veterans;

12                    (D) lowering the suicide risk of student  
13           veterans; and

14                    (E) helping student veterans achieve edu-  
15           cational goals.

16           (4) An assessment of barriers to expanding the  
17           program and how the Secretary intends to address  
18           such barriers.

19           (5) An assessment of whether the program  
20           should be expanded outside of the Office of Mental  
21           Health and Suicide Prevention to support students  
22           veterans with needs unrelated to mental health or  
23           suicide.

24           (b) UNIFORM BEST PRACTICES, GOALS, AND MEAS-  
25           URES.—The Secretary shall establish best practices, goals,

1 and measures for the Veterans Integration to Academic  
2 Leadership program of the Department that are uniform  
3 among the medical centers of the Department.

4 (c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall conduct out-  
5 reach among the Armed Forces, veterans service organiza-  
6 tions, institutions of higher learning, and non-college de-  
7 gree programs with respect to the Veterans Integration  
8 to Academic Leadership program of the Department.

9 (d) ASSESSMENT.—The Secretary shall assess the  
10 feasibility and advisability of including the suicide rate for  
11 student veterans in the National Veteran Suicide Preven-  
12 tion Annual Report of the Office of Mental Health and  
13 Suicide Prevention of the Department.

14 (e) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

15 (1) The term “institution of higher learning”  
16 has the meaning given that term in section 3452 of  
17 title 38, United States Code.

18 (2) The term “student veteran” means the fol-  
19 lowing:

20 (A) A veteran or member of the Armed  
21 Forces using educational assistance under any  
22 of the following provisions of law:

23 (i) Chapter 30, 31, 32, or 33 of title  
24 38, United States Code, or chapter 1606  
25 or 1607 of title 10, United States Code.



1 (ii) Section 116 of the Harry W.  
2 Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance  
3 Act of 2017 (Public Law 115–48; 38  
4 U.S.C. 3001 note).

5 (iii) Section 8006 of the American  
6 Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (Public Law  
7 117–2; 38 U.S.C. 3001 note prec.).

8 (B) A veteran who is enrolled in an institu-  
9 tion of higher learning or other training pro-  
10 gram, without regard to whether the veteran is  
11 using educational assistance specified in sub-  
12 paragraph (A).

13 **SEC. 502. IMPROVEMENT OF SLEEP DISORDER CARE FUR-**  
14 **NISHED BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
15 **FAIRS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Pursuant to the analysis con-  
17 ducted under subsection (b), the Secretary of Veterans Af-  
18 fairs shall take such action as the Secretary considers ap-  
19 propriate to improve the assessment and treatment of vet-  
20 erans with sleep disorders, including by conducting in-  
21 home sleep studies for veterans.

22 (b) ANALYSIS.—The Secretary shall conduct an anal-  
23 ysis of the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs  
24 to treat sleep disorders among veterans, including—

1           (1) assessment and treatment options for such  
2 disorders;

3           (2) barriers to care for such disorders, such as  
4 wait time, travel time, and lack of staffing;

5           (3) the efficacy of the clinical practice guide-  
6 lines of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the  
7 Department of Defense for such disorders; and

8           (4) the availability of and efficacy of the use by  
9 the Department of Veterans Affairs of cognitive be-  
10 havioral therapy for insomnia.

11       (c) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date  
12 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit  
13 to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and  
14 the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-  
15 resentatives a report on—

16           (1) the findings from the analysis conducted  
17 under subsection (b); and

18           (2) any actions taken under subsection (a) to  
19 improve the assessment and treatment of veterans  
20 with sleep disorders.

21       (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS FOR IN-  
22 HOME SLEEP STUDIES.—There is authorized to be appro-  
23 priated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs \$5,000,000  
24 to be used to conduct in-home sleep studies for veterans,

1 as part of sleep disorder assessment and treatment con-  
2 ducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

3 **SEC. 503. STUDY ON INPATIENT MENTAL HEALTH AND SUB-**  
4 **STANCE USE CARE FROM DEPARTMENT OF**  
5 **VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

6 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the  
7 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
8 erans Affairs shall complete the conduct of a study on ac-  
9 cess of veterans to care under the residential rehabilitation  
10 treatment programs of the Department of Veterans Af-  
11 fairs to determine—

12 (1) if there are sufficient geographic offerings  
13 of inpatient mental health care, especially for vet-  
14 erans in rural and remote communities;

15 (2) if there are sufficient bed spaces at each lo-  
16 cation, based on demand and drive time from the  
17 homes of veterans;

18 (3) if there are any workforce-related capacity  
19 limitations at each location, including if beds are un-  
20 able to be used because there are not enough pro-  
21 viders to care for additional patients;

22 (4) if there are diagnosis-specific or sex-specific  
23 barriers to accessing care under such programs; and

24 (5) the average wait time for a bed in such a  
25 program, broken out by—

- 1 (A) Veterans Integrated Service Network;
- 2 (B) rural or urban area;
- 3 (C) sex; and
- 4 (D) specialty (general program, substance
- 5 use disorder program, military sexual trauma
- 6 program, etc.).

7 (b) RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MODIFICATIONS TO  
8 TREATMENT PROGRAMS.—Using the results from the  
9 study conducted under subsection (a), the Secretary shall  
10 make recommendations for—

11 (1) new locations for opening facilities to par-  
12 ticipate in the residential rehabilitation treatment  
13 programs of the Department;

14 (2) facilities under such programs at which new  
15 beds can be added; and

16 (3) any additional specialty tracks to be added  
17 to such programs, such as substance use disorder or  
18 military sexual trauma, in order to meet veteran  
19 need and demand.

20 (c) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after comple-  
21 tion of the study under subsection (a), the Secretary shall  
22 submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Sen-  
23 ate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House  
24 of Representatives a report on the findings of the study

1 conducted under subsection (a) and the recommendations  
2 made by the Secretary under subsection (b).

3 **SEC. 504. STUDY ON TREATMENT FROM DEPARTMENT OF**  
4 **VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR CO-OCCURRING**  
5 **MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DIS-**  
6 **ORDERS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the  
8 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-  
9 erans Affairs shall conduct a study examining—

10 (1) the availability of treatment programs for  
11 veterans with co-occurring mental health and sub-  
12 stance use disorders (including both inpatient and  
13 outpatient care);

14 (2) any geographic disparities in access to such  
15 programs, such as for rural and remote veterans;  
16 and

17 (3) the average wait times for care under such  
18 programs.

19 (b) REPORT.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years  
21 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
22 retary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans'  
23 Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-  
24 erans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a re-

1 port on the findings of the study conducted under  
2 subsection (a).

3 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-  
4 graph (1) shall include—

5 (A) any recommendations resulting from  
6 the study conducted under subsection (a) with  
7 respect to improving timeliness and quality of  
8 care and meeting treatment preferences for vet-  
9 erans with co-occurring mental health and sub-  
10 stance use disorders; and

11 (B) a description of any actions taken by  
12 the Secretary to improve care for such veterans.

13 **SEC. 505. STUDY ON WORKLOAD OF SUICIDE PREVENTION**  
14 **TEAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**  
15 **FAIRS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-  
17 fairs, acting through the Under Secretary for Health and  
18 the Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, shall  
19 conduct a study evaluating the workload of local suicide  
20 prevention teams of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

21 (b) ELEMENTS.—The study conducted under sub-  
22 section (a) shall—

23 (1) identify the effects of the growth of the sui-  
24 cide prevention program of the Department on the  
25 workload of suicide prevention teams;

1           (2) incorporate key practices for staffing model  
2       design in determining suicide prevention staffing  
3       needs; and

4           (3) determine which facilities of the Depart-  
5       ment need increased suicide prevention coordinator  
6       staffing to meet the needs of veterans, with an em-  
7       phasis placed on facilities with high patient volume  
8       and facilities located in States with high rates of vet-  
9       eran suicide.

10       (c) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date  
11   of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit  
12   to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and  
13   the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Rep-  
14   resentatives a report—

15           (1) on the findings of the study conducted  
16       under subsection (a); and

17           (2) indicating any changes made to the staffing  
18       of suicide prevention teams of the Department re-  
19       sulting from the determinations made under sub-  
20       section (b)(3), including a list of facilities of the De-  
21       partment where staffing was adjusted.

22   **SEC. 506. EXPANSION OF SUICIDE PREVENTION AND MEN-**  
23                           **TAL HEALTH RESEARCH.**

24       (a) RESEARCH ON MORAL INJURY.—The Secretary  
25   of Veterans Affairs, acting through the Office of Research

1 and Development of the Department of Veterans Affairs,  
2 shall conduct suicide prevention and mental health care  
3 improvement research on how moral injury relates to the  
4 mental health needs of veterans who served in the Armed  
5 Forces after September 11, 2001, and best practices for  
6 mental health treatment for such veterans.

7 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
8 authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Vet-  
9 erans Affairs an additional \$10,000,000 to be used by the  
10 Center of Excellence for Suicide Prevention of the Depart-  
11 ment and the Rocky Mountain Mental Illness Research  
12 Education and Clinical Center for purposes of conducting  
13 research on the factors impacting veteran suicide and best  
14 practices for early intervention and support.

15 **SEC. 507. STUDY ON MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PRE-**  
16 **VENTION SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FAMILIES.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-  
18 fairs, in collaboration with the Secretary of Defense, shall  
19 conduct a study on secondary post-traumatic stress dis-  
20 order and depression and its impact on spouses, children,  
21 and caregivers of members of the Armed Forces.

22 (b) REPORT.—

23 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years  
24 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
25 retary of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the



1 Secretary of Defense, shall submit to Congress, vet-  
2 erans service organizations, and military support or-  
3 ganizations a report on the findings of the study  
4 conducted under subsection (a).

5 (2) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

6 (A) The term “military support organiza-  
7 tion” has the meaning given that term by the  
8 Secretary of Defense.

9 (B) The term “veterans service organiza-  
10 tion” means an organization recognized by the  
11 Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the represen-  
12 tation of veterans under section 5902 of title  
13 38, United States Code.

14 **SEC. 508. RESEARCH ON BRAIN HEALTH.**

15 There is authorized to be appropriated to the Depart-  
16 ment of Veterans Affairs an additional \$5,000,000 for on-  
17 going and future research at the Translational Research  
18 Center of the Department of Veterans Affairs for trau-  
19 matic brain injury and stress disorders to provide better  
20 understanding of, and improved treatment options for,  
21 veterans who served in the Armed Forces after September  
22 11, 2001, and who have traumatic brain injury or post-  
23 traumatic stress disorder.

1 **SEC. 509. STUDY ON EFFICACY OF CLINICAL AND AT-HOME**  
2 **RESOURCES FOR POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS**  
3 **DISORDER.**

4 Not later than two years after the date of the enact-  
5 ment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, acting  
6 through the Office of Research and Development of the  
7 Department of Veterans Affairs, shall conduct a study  
8 on—

9 (1) the efficacy of clinical and at-home re-  
10 sources, such as mobile applications like COVID  
11 Coach, for providers, veterans, caregivers, and fam-  
12 ily members to use for dealing with stressors;

13 (2) the feasibility and advisability of developing  
14 more such resources;

15 (3) strategies for improving mental health care  
16 and outcomes for veterans with post-traumatic stress  
17 disorder; and

18 (4) best practices for helping family members of  
19 veterans deal with secondary post-traumatic stress  
20 disorder or mental health concerns.



Union Calendar No. 292

117<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
2<sup>D</sup> Session

**H. R. 6411**

[Report No. 117-382]

**A BILL**

To amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements in the mental health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

JUNE 22, 2022

Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed