

## **Veterans' Benefits Improvements Act of 1996**

[Public Law 104–275]

[As Amended Through P.L. 118–210, Enacted January 2, 2025]

【Currency: This publication is a compilation of the text of section 504 of Public Law 104–275. It was last amended by the public law listed in the As Amended Through note above and below at the bottom of each page of the pdf version and reflects current law through the date of the enactment of the public law listed at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/comps/>】

【Note: While this publication does not represent an official version of any Federal statute, substantial efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy of its contents. The official version of Federal law is found in the United States Statutes at Large and in the United States Code. The legal effect to be given to the Statutes at Large and the United States Code is established by statute (1 U.S.C. 112, 204).】

AN ACT To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the benefits programs administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to provide for a study of the Federal programs for veterans, and for other purposes.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

### **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the “Veterans’ Benefits Improvements Act of 1996”.

(b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—[Omitted]

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## **TITLE V—DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

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### **SEC. 504. [38 U.S.C. 5101 note] PILOT PROGRAM FOR USE OF CONTRACT HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS FOR DISABILITY EXAMINATIONS.**

(a) AUTHORITY.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, acting through the Under Secretary for Benefits, may conduct a pilot program under this section under which examinations with respect to medical disability of applicants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary that are carried out through the Under Secretary for Benefits may be made by persons other than employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Any such examination shall be performed pursuant to contracts entered into by the Under Secretary for Benefits with those persons.

(b) LIMITATION.—The Secretary may carry out the pilot program under this section as follows:

(1) In fiscal years before fiscal year 2015, through not more than 10 regional offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) In fiscal year 2015, through not more than 12 regional offices of the Department.

(3) In fiscal year 2016, through not more than 15 regional offices of the Department.

(4) In fiscal year 2017 and each fiscal year thereafter, through such regional offices of the Department as the Secretary considers appropriate.

(c) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any law regarding the licensure of health care professionals, only a health care professional described in paragraph (2) may conduct an examination pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a) at any location in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, so long as the examination is within the scope of the authorized duties under such contract.

(2) HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL DESCRIBED.—A health care professional described in this paragraph is a physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, audiologist, or psychologist, who—

(A) has a current unrestricted license to practice the health care profession of the physician, physician assistant, nurse practitioner, audiologist, or psychologist, as the case may be;

(B) is not barred from practicing such health care profession in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States; and

(C) is performing authorized duties for the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a).

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[Note: Section 2002(a)(4) of Public Law 116–315 (as amended by section 1 of Public Law 118–19) provides “On the date that is five years after the date of the enactment of this Act [Jan. 5, 2021], subsection (c) of such section shall read as it read on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act.”. Upon such date [Jan. 5, 2026], subsection (c) (as in effect just prior to January 5, 2021) will read as follow:]

(c) LICENSURE OF CONTRACT PHYSICIANS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any law regarding the licensure of physicians, a physician described in paragraph (2) may conduct an examination pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a) at any location in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States, so long as the examination is within the scope of the authorized duties under such contract.

(2) PHYSICIAN DESCRIBED.—A physician described in this paragraph is a physician who—

(A) has a current unrestricted license to practice the health care profession of the physician;

*(B) is not barred from practicing such health care profession in any State, the District of Columbia, or a Commonwealth, territory, or possession of the United States; and*

*(C) is performing authorized duties for the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to a contract entered into under subsection (a).*

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(d) **SOURCE OF FUNDS.**—Expenses of carrying out the pilot program under this section, including payments for pilot program examination travel and incidental expenses under the terms and conditions set forth by 38 U.S.C. 111, shall be reimbursed to the accounts available for the general operating expenses of the Veterans Benefits Administration and information technology systems from amounts available to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for payment of compensation and pensions.

(e) **REPORT TO CONGRESS.**—Not later than three years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Congress a report on the effect of the use of the authority provided by subsection (a) on the cost, timeliness, and thoroughness of medical disability examinations.

(f) **CERTAIN INFORMATION PROVIDED TO HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL.**—The Secretary shall provide to a health care professional who performs an examination under subsection (a), or a contractor performing a contract under such subsection, the contact information of any agent or attorney recognized by the Secretary under chapter 59 of title 38, United States Code, with regards to a claim for benefits that gives rise to such examination.

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