

GROW OUR OWN DIRECTIVE: PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT
 EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION ACT OF 2016

SEPTEMBER 6, 2016.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State
 of the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. MILLER of Florida, from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
 submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 3974]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 3974) to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to establish pay grades and require competitive pay for physician assistants of the Department, and for other purposes, having considered the same, report favorably thereon with amendment and recommend that the bill as amended do pass.

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AMENDMENT

The amendments are as follows:
Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act of 2016”.

SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS TO BE EMPLOYED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) PILOT PROGRAM.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program to be known as the “Grow Our Own Directive” or “G.O.O.D.” pilot program (in this section referred to as the “pilot program”) to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) INFORMATION ON PILOT PROGRAM.—The Secretary shall provide information on the pilot program to eligible individuals under subsection (b), including information on application requirements and a list of entities with which the Secretary has partnered under subsection (g).

(b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—An individual is eligible to participate in the pilot program if the individual—

(1) has medical or military health experience gained while serving as a member of the Armed Forces;

(2) has received a certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master’s degree, or postbaccalaureate training in a science relating to health care;

(3) has participated in the delivery of health care services or related medical services, including participation in military training relating to the identification, evaluation, treatment, and prevention of diseases and disorders; and

(4) does not have a degree of doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry.

(c) DURATION.—The pilot program shall be carried out during the five-year period beginning on the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(d) SELECTION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall select not less than 250 eligible individuals under subsection (b) to participate in the pilot program.

(2) PRIORITY FOR SELECTION.—In selecting individuals to participate in the pilot program under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give priority to the following individuals:

(A) Individuals who participated in the Intermediate Care Technician Pilot Program of the Department that was carried out by the Secretary between January 2011 and February 2015.

(B) Individuals who agree to be employed as a physician assistant for the Veterans Health Administration at a medical facility of the Department located in a community that—

(i) is designated as a medically underserved population under section 330(b)(3)(A) of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(b)(3)(A)); and

(ii) is in a State with a per capita population of veterans of more than 9 percent according to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the United States Census Bureau.

(e) EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall provide educational assistance to individuals participating in the pilot program, including through the use of scholarships, to cover the costs to such individuals of obtaining a master’s degree in physician assistant studies or a similar master’s degree.

(2) USE OF EXISTING PROGRAMS.—In providing educational assistance under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall use the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program under chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code, and such other educational assistance programs of the Department as the Secretary considers appropriate.

- (3) USE OF SCHOLARSHIPS.—The Secretary shall provide not less than 35 scholarships under the pilot program to individuals participating in the pilot program during each year in which the pilot program is carried out.
- (f) PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.—
- (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall enter into an agreement with each individual participating in the pilot program in which such individual agrees to be employed as a physician assistant for the Veterans Health Administration for a period of obligated service specified in paragraph (2).
- (2) PERIOD SPECIFIED.—With respect to each individual participating in the pilot program, the period of obligated service specified in this paragraph for the individual is—
- (A) if the individual is participating in the pilot program through a program described in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obligated service, the period specified with respect to such program; or
- (B) if the individual is participating in the pilot program other than through a program described in such subsection, or if such program does not specify a period of obligated service, a period of three years or such other period as the Secretary considers appropriate for purposes of the pilot program.
- (g) BREACH.—
- (1) LIABILITY.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), an individual who participates in the pilot program and fails to satisfy the period of obligated service under subsection (f) shall be liable to the United States, in lieu of such obligated service, for the amount that has been paid or is payable to or on behalf of the individual under the pilot program, reduced by the proportion that the number of days served for completion of the period of obligated service bears to the total number of days in the period of obligated service of such individual.
- (2) EXCEPTION.—If an individual is participating in the pilot program through a program described in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obligated service, the liability of the individual for failing to satisfy the period of obligated service under subsection (f) shall be determined as specified with respect to such program.
- (h) MENTORS.—The Secretary shall ensure that a physician assistant mentor or mentors are available for individuals participating in the pilot program at each facility of the Veterans Health Administration at which a participant in the pilot program is employed.
- (i) PARTNERSHIPS.—In carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall seek to partner with the following:
- (1) Not less than 15 institutions of higher education that—
- (A) offer a master's degree program in physician assistant studies or a similar area of study that is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant; and
- (B) agree—
- (i) to guarantee seats in such master's degree program for individuals participating in the pilot program who meet the entrance requirements for such master's degree program; and
- (ii) to provide individuals participating in the pilot program with information on admissions criteria and the admissions process.
- (2) Other institutions of higher education that offer programs in physician assistant studies or other similar areas of studies that are accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant.
- (3) The Transition Assistance Program of the Department of Defense.
- (4) The Veterans' Employment and Training Service of the Department of Labor.
- (5) Programs carried out under chapter 41 of title 38, United States Code, for the purpose of marketing and advertising the pilot program to veterans and members of the Armed Forces who may be interested in the pilot program.
- (j) ADMINISTRATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—For purposes of carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall appoint or select within the Office of Physician Assistant Services of the Veterans Health Administration the following:
- (1) A Deputy Director for Education and Career Development of Physician Assistants who—
- (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and employed by the Department as of the date of the enactment of this Act;
- (B) is responsible for—
- (i) overseeing the pilot program;
- (ii) recruiting candidates to participate in the pilot program;

- (iii) coordinating with individuals participating in the pilot program and assisting those individuals in applying and being admitted to a master's degree program under the pilot program; and
- (iv) providing information to eligible individuals under subsection (b) with respect to the pilot program; and
- (C) may be employed in the field at a medical center of the Department.
- (2) A Deputy Director of Recruitment and Retention who—
 - (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and employed by the Department as of the date of the enactment of this Act;
 - (B) is responsible for—
 - (i) identifying and coordinating the needs of the pilot program and assist the Secretary in providing mentors under subsection (h) to participants in the pilot program; and
 - (ii) coordinating the staff of facilities of the Veterans Health Administration with respect to identifying employment positions and mentors under subsection (h) for participants in the pilot program; and
 - (C) may be employed in the field at a medical center of the Department.
- (3) A recruiter who—
 - (A) reports directly to the Deputy Director of Recruitment and Retention; and
 - (B) works with the Workforce Management and Consulting Office and the Healthcare Talent Management Office of the Veterans Health Administration to develop and implement national recruiting strategic plans for the recruitment and retention of physician assistants within the Department.
 - (4) An administrative assistant, compensated at a rate not less than level GS-6 of the General Schedule, or equivalent, who assists with administrative duties relating to the pilot program in the Office of Physician Assistant Services and such other duties as determined by the Secretary to ensure that the Office runs effectively and efficiently.
- (k) REPORT.—
 - (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program.
 - (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by paragraph (1) shall include the following:
 - (A) The extent to which the pilot program is effective in improving the ability of eligible individuals under subsection (b) to become physician assistants;
 - (B) An examination of whether the pilot program is achieving the goals of—
 - (i) enabling individuals to build on medical skills gained as members of the Armed Forces by entering into the physician assistant workforce of the Department; and
 - (ii) helping to meet the shortage of physician assistants employed by the Department.
 - (C) An identification of such modifications to the pilot program as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services consider necessary to meet the goals described in subparagraph (B).
 - (D) An assessment of whether the pilot program could serve as a model for other programs of the Department to assist individuals in obtaining certification and employment in other health care fields.

Amend the title so as to read:

A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

H.R. 3974, the “Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act of 2015,” was introduced by Representative Ann McLane Kuster of New Hampshire on November 5, 2015. The bill, as amended, was ordered to be favorably reported to the full House on May 18, 2016, by voice vote. H.R. 3974, as

amended, would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out the Grow Our Own Directive—or, G.O.O.D.—pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as VA physician assistants (PAs).

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

The PA profession started in the mid-1960s in response to a nationwide shortage of primary care physicians. The first class of PAs were primarily composed of Army medics and Navy corpsman who had served in the Vietnam War. The significant number of veterans working as PAs has continued since that time and is illustrative of the unique relationship veterans and the VA health care system have historically had with the PA profession. According to testimony from the VA Physician Assistants Association (VAPAA), VA is the largest single federal employer of PAs, and a quarter of all primary care patients in the VA health care system are seen by PAs.¹ However, VA has experienced recent difficulties recruiting and retaining PAs within the VA health care system, and as such, PAs are a top 5 mission-critical occupation for VA, ranking fourth according to a January 2015 VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) report.²

The Committee believes that PAs are critical to VA's ability to provide access to timely, high-quality care to veteran patients and encourages VA to prioritize recruitment and retention of PAs within the VA health care system. As such, the bill would require VA to carry out the G.O.O.D. pilot for five years to assist certain veterans in obtaining education and training as PAs. Individuals eligible to participate in the G.O.O.D. pilot would include those with medical or military health experience who have received a certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master's degree, or post-baccalaureate training in a science relating to health care and that have participated in the delivery of health care services or related medical services but do not have a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry degree. VA would be required to select not less than 250 eligible individuals to participate in the pilot and give priority to those who participated in the VA Intermediate Care Technician pilot program and who agree to work as a PA at VA medical facilities in medically underserved communities or in states with a per capita population of veterans of more than nine percent. The bill would also require VA to provide educational assistance—to include not less than 35 scholarships—to individuals participating in the pilot program through the VA Health Professionals Educational Assistance program, to enter into an agreement for a period of obligated service with each individual participating in the pilot program who agrees to work as a VA PA, and to ensure PA mentors are available for pilot program participants. Finally, the bill would require VA to appoint a Deputy Director for PA Education and Career Development and a Deputy Director for Recruitment and Retention from within the VA Office of

¹May 15, 2015, Subcommittee on Health hearing, "Overcoming Barriers to More Efficient and Effective VA Staffing," <http://veterans.house.gov/hearing/overcoming-barriers-to-more-efficient-and-effective-va-staffing>.

²January 30, 2015, VA Inspector General report, "Determination of VHA Occupational Staffing Shortages," <http://www.va.gov/oig/pubs/VAOIG-15-00430-103.pdf>.

PAs and to submit a report to Congress on the pilot program one year after enactment.

HEARINGS

There were no full Committee hearings held on H.R. 3974, as amended.

On April 20, 2016, the Subcommittee on Health held a legislative hearing on various bills introduced in the 114th Congress, including H.R. 3974. The following witnesses testified:

The Honorable Lee Zeldin, U.S House of Representatives, 1st Congressional District, New York; The Honorable Mike Bost, U.S. House of Representatives, 12th Congressional District, Illinois; The Honorable Ann McLane Kuster; U.S. House of Representatives, 2nd Congressional District, New Hampshire; The Honorable Elise Stefanik, U.S. House of Representatives, 21st Congressional District, New York; The Honorable Jackie Walorski, U.S. House of Representatives, 2nd Congressional District, Indiana; Diane M. Zumatto, National Legislative Director, AMVETS; Shurhonda Y. Love, Assistant National Legislative Director, Disabled American Veterans; Fred S. Sganga, Legislative Officer, National Association of State Veteran Homes; Maureen McCarthy M.D., Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Patient Care Services, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Accompanied by: Susan Blauert, Chief Counsel, Health Care Law Group, Office of General Counsel, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Statements for the record were submitted by:

The American Legion, American Psychiatric Association, Easter Seals, National Association of Mental Illness, Veterans Affairs Physician Assistant Association, Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

SUBCOMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On April 29, 2016, the Subcommittee on Health met in open markup session, a quorum being present, and ordered H.R. 3974, as amended, favorably forwarded to the full Committee by voice vote. During consideration of the bill, the following amendment in the nature of a substitute was considered and agreed to by voice vote:

An Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 3974 offered by Representative Ann McLane Kuster of New Hampshire.

COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On May 18, 2016, the full Committee met in open markup session, a quorum being present, and ordered H.R. 3974, as amended, reported favorably to the House of Representatives by voice vote. During consideration of the bill, the following amendment in the nature of a substitute was considered and agreed to by voice vote:

An Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute to H.R. 3974, as amended, offered by Representative Ann McLane Kuster of New Hampshire.

A motion by Representative Corrine Brown of Florida to favorably report H.R. 3974, as amended, to the House of Representatives was agreed to by voice vote.

COMMITTEE VOTES

In compliance with clause 3(b) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, there were no recorded votes taken on amendments or in connection with ordering H.R. 3974, as amended, reported to the House.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT FINDINGS

In compliance with clause 3(c)(1) of rule XIII and clause (2)(b)(1) of rule X of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee's oversight findings and recommendations are reflected in the descriptive portions of this report.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL PERFORMANCE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In accordance with clause 3(c)(4) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee's performance goals and objectives are to ensure VA provides educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as VA physician assistants and increases access to care for veteran patients through the increased availability of VA physician assistants.

NEW BUDGET AUTHORITY, ENTITLEMENT AUTHORITY, AND TAX EXPENDITURES

In compliance with clause 3(c)(2) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the Committee adopts as its own the estimate of new budget authority, entitlement authority, or tax expenditures or revenues contained in the cost estimate prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

EARMARKS AND TAX AND TARIFF BENEFITS

H.R. 3974, as amended, does not contain any Congressional earmarks, limited tax benefits, or limited tariff benefits as defined in clause 9 of rule XXI of the Rules of the House of Representatives.

COMMITTEE COST ESTIMATE

The Committee adopts as its own the cost estimate on H.R. 3974, as amended, prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974.

CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

Pursuant to clause 3(c)(3) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, the following is the cost estimate for H.R. 3974, as amended, provided by the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974:

U.S. CONGRESS,
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,
Washington, DC, June 28, 2016.

Hon. JEFF MILLER
*Chairman, Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
House of Representatives, Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for H.R. 3974, the Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act of 2016.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Ann E. Futrell.

Sincerely,

KEITH HALL.

Enclosure.

H.R. 3974—Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act of 2016

Summary: H.R. 3974 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out a five-year pilot program that would provide educational assistance to veterans training to be physician assistants (PAs) for the department. CBO estimates that implementing the bill would cost \$36 million over the 2017–2021 period, subject to appropriation of the necessary amounts.

Pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply because enacting the legislation would not affect direct spending or revenues. CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 3974 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2027.

H.R. 3974 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

Estimated cost to the Federal Government: The estimated budgetary effect of H.R. 3974 is shown in the following table. The costs of this legislation fall within budget function 700 (veterans benefits and services).

	By fiscal year, in millions of dollars—					
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017–2021
INCREASE IN SPENDING SUBJECT TO APPROPRIATION						
Estimated Authorization Level	3	7	10	11	6	37
Estimated Outlays	2	7	10	11	6	36

Basis of estimate: For this estimate, CBO assumes that H.R. 3974 will be enacted near the start of fiscal year 2017, that the necessary amounts will be provided, and that outlays will follow historical spending patterns for affected programs.

Within 180 days of enactment, the bill would require VA to establish a five-year pilot program that would pay for certain veterans to obtain master's degrees in physician assistant studies. Participants in the pilot program would be required to work as PAs for VA for at least three years. The bill would require VA to offer educational assistance to at least 250 candidates and to provide no fewer than 35 scholarships each year.

A master's degree program in physician assistant studies takes two years to complete. Based on a review of various graduate programs for PA studies, CBO estimates that the average annual cost for tuition was \$36,000 in 2015 and, after accounting for projected inflation, would average about \$44,000 over the 2017–2021 period. Based on the assistance provided by VA under the existing Health Professional Educational Assistance Program, CBO expects that VA would cover the full costs of tuition and provide an annual stipend that would average \$22,000. CBO expects that those benefits would be provided to 35 people in 2017 and a total of 250 people through 2021. On that basis, CBO estimates that providing benefits under this program would cost \$32 million over the 2017–2021 period.

To administer the pilot program, H.R. 3974 would require VA to establish two new deputy director positions and two supporting positions. On the basis of information from VA on compensation for deputy directors, we estimate that the salary and other benefits for that position would amount to roughly \$190,000 a year. Including the costs of compensation for a recruiter, an administrative assistant, and the necessary office space, CBO estimates that administering the program would cost \$4 million over the 2017–2021 period.

In total, CBO estimates that implementing the pilot program would cost \$36 million over the 2017–2021 period, assuming appropriation of the necessary amounts.

Pay-As-You-Go considerations: None.

Increase in long-term direct spending and deficits: CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 3974 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2027.

Intergovernmental and private-sector impact: H.R. 3974 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in UMRA and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

Estimate prepared by: Federal Costs: Ann E. Futrell; Impact on State, Local, and Tribal Governments: Jon Sperl; Impact on the Private Sector: Paige Piper/Bach .

Estimate approved by: H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.

FEDERAL MANDATES STATEMENT

The Committee adopts as its own the estimate of Federal mandates regarding H.R. 3974, as amended, prepared by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 423 of the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE STATEMENT

No advisory committees within the meaning of section 5(b) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act would be created by H.R. 3974, as amended.

STATEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to Article I, section 8 of the United States Constitution, H.R. 3974, as amended, is authorized by Congress' power to "pro-

vide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States.”

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that H.R. 3974, as amended, does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accommodations within the meaning of section 102(b)(3) of the Congressional Accountability Act.

STATEMENT ON DUPLICATION OF FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Pursuant to section 3(g) of H. Res. 5, 114th Cong. (2015), the Committee finds that no provision of H.R. 3974, as amended, establishes or reauthorizes a program of the Federal Government known to be duplicative of another Federal program, a program that was included in any report from the Government Accountability Office to Congress pursuant to section 21 of Public Law 111–139, or a program related to a program identified in the most recent Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance.

DISCLOSURE OF DIRECTED RULEMAKING

Pursuant to section 3(i) of H. Res. 5, 114th Cong. (2015), the Committee estimates that H.R. 3974, as amended, contains no directed rule making that would require the Secretary to prescribe regulations.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATION

Section 1. Short title

Section 1 of the bill would provide the short title of the “Grow Our Own Directive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act of 2016.”

Section 2. Pilot program to provide educational assistance to physician assistants to be employed at the Department of Veterans Affairs

Section 2(a) of the bill would require VA to carry out a pilot program called the “Grow Our Own Directive” (or, “G.O.O.D.”) to provide assistance to veterans for education and training as VA physician assistants. Section 2(a) would also require VA to provide relevant information—to include information regarding the application process and a list of entities with which VA has partnered—to individuals eligible for the G.O.O.D. pilot.

Section 2(b) of the bill would require that the eligibility criteria for the G.O.O.D. pilot be defined as follows: (1) possession of medical or military health experience gained while serving as a member of the Armed Forces; (2) possession of a certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master’s degree, or post baccalaureate training in a science relating to health care; (3) participation in the delivery of health care services or related medical services, including military training relating to identification, evaluation, treatment, and prevention of diseases and disorders; and, (4) lack of a doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry degree.

Section 2(c) of the bill would require that the G.O.O.D. pilot be carried out for five years, beginning 180 days after the date of enactment.

Section 2(d) of the bill would require VA to select at least 250 eligible individuals to participate in the G.O.O.D. pilot. In selecting eligible individuals, VA would give priority to those who participated in the Intermediate Care Technician pilot program and those who agree to be employed as a physician assistant at a VA facility in a community that is designated as serving a medically underserved population in a state with a per capita veteran population of more than nine percent.

Section 2(e) of the bill would require VA to provide assistance, including through scholarships, to individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot to cover the costs of obtaining a master's degree in physician assistant studies or a similar master's degree. VA would also be required to use the VA Health Professionals Education Assistance Program and such other educational assistance programs as considered appropriate to individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot. Additionally, VA would be required to provide at least 35 scholarships to individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot during each year in which the pilot is carried out.

Section 2(f) of the bill would require VA to enter into agreements with each G.O.O.D. pilot participant stipulating that the participant will be employed as a VA physician assistant for a period of three years, unless a participating individual is in a program described in subsection (e)(2) of the bill and that program specified a period of time during which that individual agreed to work for VA.

Section 2(g) of the bill would require that an individual who participated in the G.O.O.D. pilot and who fails to satisfy the period of obligated service described in subsection (f)(2) of the bill is liable for the amount that has been paid or is payable to or on behalf of the individual reduced by the number of days served for completion of the period of obligated service. If an individual is participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot through a program described in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obligated service, the liability of the individual for failing to satisfy the period of obligated service under subsection (f)(1) would be determined as specified with respect to such program.

Section 2(h) of the bill would require VA to ensure physician assistant mentors are available for individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot at each VA facility at which pilot participants are working.

Section 2(i) of the bill would require that, in carrying out the G.O.O.D. pilot, VA seek to partner with: (1) at least 15 institutions of higher education that offer a master's degree program in physician assistant studies or a similar area of study that is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant and that agree to guarantee seats in such programs for individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot who meet the entrance requirements and to provide pilot participants with information on admissions; (2) other institutions of higher education that offer programs in physician assistant studies or other similar areas of studies that are accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant; (3) the

Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program; (4) the Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service; and (5) programs carried out under chapter 41 of title 38, U.S.C., for the purpose of marketing and advertising the G.O.O.D. pilot to veterans and members of the Armed Forces who may be interested.

Section 2(j) of the bill would require that, for the purposes of carrying out the G.O.O.D. pilot, VA appoint from within the Office of Physician Assistants, a Deputy Director for Education and Career Development of Physician Assistants who is a physician assistant, a veteran, and a VA employee to be responsible for the following: (1) overseeing the G.O.O.D. pilot; (2) recruiting candidates to participate in the G.O.O.D. pilot; (3) coordinating with individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot; and (4) assisting individuals participating in the G.O.O.D. pilot in applying to master's programs. VA would also be required to select a Deputy Director of Recruitment and Retention who is a physician assistant employed by VA to be responsible for: (1) identifying and coordinating the needs of the pilot program; (2) assisting VA in providing mentors to G.O.O.D. pilot participants; and (3) coordinating VA facility staff with respect to identifying employment positions and mentors. This Section would also require VA require to select a recruiter to report directly to the Deputy Director of Recruitment and Retention and work with the Workforce Management and Consulting Office and the Healthcare Talent Management Office to develop and implement national recruiting strategic plans for the recruitment and retention of VA physician assistants. Further, Section 2(j) of the bill would require VA to select an administrative assistant, compensated at a rate not less than level GS-6 or equivalent, to assist with administrative duties relating to the G.O.O.D. pilot in the Office of Physician Assistant Services and such other duties as determined by the Secretary to ensure that the Office runs effectively and efficiently.

Section 2(k) of the bill would require that, within one year of enactment, VA submit to Congress a report on the pilot program, in collaboration with the Department of Labor, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Health and Human Services. The report must include: (1) the extent to which the G.O.O.D. pilot is effective in improving the ability of participants to become physician assistants; (2) an examination of whether the G.O.O.D. pilot is achieving the goal of enabling individuals to build on medical skills gained as members of the Armed Forces by entering into the VA physician assistant workforce and helping to meet the shortage of physician assistants employed by VA; (3) an identification of such modifications to the pilot program as considered necessary; and (4) an assessment of whether the G.O.O.D. pilot could serve as a model for other VA programs.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

If enacted, this bill would make no changes in existing law.

