

BUILDING SUPPORTIVE NETWORKS FOR WOMEN  
 VETERANS ACT

JUNE 28, 2017.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of  
 the Union and ordered to be printed

Mr. ROE of Tennessee, from the Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
 submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany H.R. 91]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to whom was referred the bill (H.R. 91) to amend title 38, United States Code, to make permanent the pilot program on counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service in the Armed Forces, having considered the same, report favorably thereon without amendment and recommend that the bill do pass.

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## PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

H.R. 91 was introduced by Representative Julia Brownley of California, the Ranking Member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health, on January 3, 2017.

H.R. 91 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to carry out a permanent program to provide reintegration and readjustment services in group retreat settings to women veterans newly separated from service in the Armed Forces after a prolonged deployment.

## BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

*Section 2. Counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service in the Armed Forces*

While women have served in the military since the American Revolution, women have only relatively recently come to represent a sizable portion of the veteran population. Today, women veterans number almost 2 million out of 21.6 million total veterans in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

There are indications both that military service and veteran status may affect women differently than men and that women veterans may lack access to valuable peer support opportunities once they have separated from service. For example, a report by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) found that women face barriers to full integration into military service, to recognition as veterans, and to VA services and benefits.<sup>2</sup> According to DAV, “[t]he vast majority of these deficiencies result from a disregard for the differing needs of women veterans and a focusing on the 80 percent solutions for men who dominate in both numbers and the public consciousness.”<sup>3</sup>

During the 111th Congress, the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (P.L. 111–163, 124 Stat. 1130) required VA to conduct a pilot program through the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) to evaluate the feasibility and advisability of providing reintegration and readjustment services in group retreat settings to women veterans recently separated from service in the Armed Forces after a prolonged deployment. Each group retreat was required to include the following components: information and counseling on reintegration into the veteran’s family; employment and community; financial counseling; occupational counseling; information and counseling on stress reduction; and, information and counseling on conflict resolution. Over the course of the pilot program, a total of 12 retreats were provided to 272 women veterans between 2011 and 2016.<sup>4</sup> According to VA, the retreats held to-date have focused on building trust and developing peer support in a therapeutic environment and data has shown

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Suicide Prevention. *Suicide among Veterans and Other Americans 2001–2014*. August 3, 2016. <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/2016suicidedatareport.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Disabled American Veterans. *Women Veterans: The Long Journey Home*. September 24, 2014. <https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> United States Cong. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health. Legislative Hearing. March 29, 2017. 115th Cong. 1st sess. Washington: GPO, 2017 (statement from Jennifer S. Lee, Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services, Veterans Health Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs).

that retreat participants saw increased coping abilities and decreased symptoms associated with posttraumatic stress disorder. VA also found that 87 percent of retreat participants scored higher on the Ryff Scale of Psychological Well Being immediately post-retreat and 84 percent showed a decrease in stress symptoms that persisted two months post-retreat.<sup>5</sup>

In light of the positive outcomes of the current pilot program and the Committee's commitment to ensuring that VA is properly addressing the unique needs of women veterans, section 2 of the bill would make the pilot program of counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service a permanent part of VA's programs for women veterans.

#### HEARINGS

On March 29, 2017, the Subcommittee on Health conducted a legislative hearing on a number of bills including H.R. 91.

The following witnesses testified: The Honorable David P. Roe M.D. of Tennessee; The Honorable Jackie Walorski of Indiana; The Honorable Doug Collins of Georgia; The Honorable Mike Coffman of Colorado; The Honorable Stephen Knight of California; The Honorable Ann M. Kuster of New Hampshire; Jennifer S. Lee, M.D., the Deputy Under Secretary for Health for Policy and Services for the Veterans Health Administration of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who was accompanied by Susan Blauert, the Chief Counsel for the Health Care Law Group of the Office of the General Counsel for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Kayda Keleher, Legislative Associate for the National Legislative Service of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; Shurhonda Y. Love, the Assistant National Legislative Director for the Disabled American Veterans; and, Sarah S. Dean, the Associate Legislative Director for the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

Statements for the record were submitted by: The Honorable Lee Zeldin of New York; The American Legion; the National Association of State Veteran Homes; Swords to Plowshares; and, the Wounded Warrior Project.

#### SUBCOMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On April 6, 2017, the Subcommittee on Health met in an open markup session, a quorum being present, and ordered H.R. 91 to be reported favorably to the full Committee by voice vote.

#### COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION

On May 17, 2017, the Full Committee met in open markup session, a quorum being present, and ordered H.R. 91 to be reported favorably to the House of Representatives by voice vote. A motion by Representative Tim Walz of Minnesota, Ranking Member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, to report H.R. 91 favorably 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

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

amendments or in connection with ordering H.R. 91 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 improve the provision of reintegration and readjustment services to women veterans who are recently separated from service after a prolonged deployment.

#### 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. 91 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. 91 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. 91 provided by the Director of the Congressional Budget Office pursuant to section 402 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974:

U.S. CONGRESS,  
CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE,  
*Washington, DC, May 20, 2017.*

Hon. PHIL ROE, M.D.,  
*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. 91, the Building Supportive Networks for Women Veterans Act.

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. 91—Building Supportive Networks for Women Veterans Act*

H.R. 91 would require the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to establish a permanent program that provides counseling in group retreat settings to certain women veterans who have recently separated from military service. The bill also would require the VA to submit to the Congress a biennial report on the outcomes of the program.

VA is completing the final year of a pilot program that provides similar services to women veterans. According to VA, roughly 270 women participated in the program at 12 retreats over the 2011–2016 period at an average cost of \$3,400 per participant. On the basis of information from VA, CBO expects that the department would use the authority provided under H.R. 91 to hold six retreats a year. CBO estimates that implementing this program would cost \$3 million over the 2018–2022 period after accounting for anticipated inflation; such spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

Enacting the legislation would not affect direct spending or revenues; therefore, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply. CBO estimates that enacting H.R. 91 would not increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2028.

H.R. 91 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act, and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Ann E. Futrell. The estimate was 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. 91 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. 91.

STATEMENT OF CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

Pursuant to Article I, section 8 of the United States Constitution, H.R. 91 is authorized by Congress' power to "provide for the common Defense and general Welfare of the United States."

APPLICABILITY TO LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

The Committee finds that H.R. 91 does not relate to the terms and conditions of employment or access to public services or accom-

modations 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, 115th Cong. (2017), the Committee finds that no provision of H.R. 91 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, 115th Cong. (2017), the Committee estimates that H.R. 91 contains no directed rulemaking 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 a short title of the “Building Supportive Networks for Women Veterans Act”.

##### *Section 2. Counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated from service in the armed forces*

Section 2(a)(1) of the bill would amend chapter 17 of title 38, U.S.C., by inserting after section 1712C a new section, “1712D. Counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated.” The new section 1712D would require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, beginning on January 1, 2018, to carry out a program through the Readjustment Counseling Service (RCS) to provide reintegration and readjustment services in group retreat settings to women veterans who are newly separated from service in the Armed Forces after a prolonged deployment. A veteran’s participation in the program would be voluntary and services provided under the program would include: (1) information on reintegration into the family, employment, and community of the veteran; (2) financial counseling; (3) occupational counseling; (4) information and counseling on stress reduction; (5) information and counseling on conflict resolution; and, (6) such other information and counseling as the Secretary considers appropriate to assist the veteran in reintegrating into her family, job, and community. VA would be required to report to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the program by no later than December 31, 2018, and each even-numbered year thereafter.

Section 2(a)(2) of the bill would amend the table of sections at the beginning of chapter 17 of title 38, U.S.C., by inserting after 1712C the following new item: “1712D. Counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated.”

Section 2(b) of the bill would repeal section 203 of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010 (38 U.S.C. 1712A note) effective December 31, 2017.

## CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italic, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

## CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW MADE BY THE BILL, AS REPORTED

In compliance with clause 3(e) of rule XIII of the Rules of the House of Representatives, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new matter is printed in italic, and existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

**TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE**

\* \* \* \* \*

**PART II—GENERAL BENEFITS**

\* \* \* \* \*

**CHAPTER 17—HOSPITAL, NURSING HOME,  
DOMICILIARY, AND MEDICAL CARE**

## SUBCHAPTER I—GENERAL

Sec.

1701. Definitions.

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SUBCHAPTER II—HOSPITAL, NURSING HOME, OR DOMICILIARY CARE AND  
MEDICAL TREATMENT

\* \* \* \* \*

*1712D. Counseling in retreat settings for women veterans newly separated.*

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SUBCHAPTER II—HOSPITAL, NURSING HOME, OR  
DOMICILIARY CARE AND MEDICAL TREATMENT

\* \* \* \* \*

**§ 1712D. Counseling in retreat settings for women veterans  
newly separated**

(a) *PROGRAM.—(1) Commencing on January 1, 2018, the Secretary shall carry out, through the Readjustment Counseling Service of the Veterans Health Administration, a program to provide reintegration and readjustment services described in subsection (b) in group retreat settings to women veterans who are recently separated from service in the Armed Forces after a prolonged deployment.*

(2) *The participation of a veteran in the program under paragraph (1) shall be at the election of the veteran.*

(b) *COVERED SERVICES.—The services provided to a woman veteran under the program under subsection (a)(1) shall include the following:*

(1) Information on reintegration into the family, employment, and community of the veteran.

(2) Financial counseling.

(3) Occupational counseling.

(4) Information and counseling on stress reduction.

(5) Information and counseling on conflict resolution.

(6) Such other information and counseling as the Secretary considers appropriate to assist the veteran in reintegration into the family, employment, and community of the veteran.

(c) BIENNIAL REPORTS.—Not later than December 31, 2018, and each even-numbered year thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the program under subsection (a)(1).

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## CAREGIVERS AND VETERANS OMNIBUS HEALTH SERVICES ACT OF 2010

\* \* \* \* \*

## TITLE II—WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH CARE MATTERS

\* \* \* \* \*

### SEC. 203. PILOT PROGRAM ON COUNSELING IN RETREAT SETTINGS FOR WOMEN VETERANS NEWLY SEPARATED FROM SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES.

#### (a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

[(1) IN GENERAL.—Commencing not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out, through the Readjustment Counseling Service of the Veterans Health Administration, a pilot program to evaluate the feasibility and advisability of providing reintegration and readjustment services described in subsection (b) in group retreat settings to women veterans who are recently separated from service in the Armed Forces after a prolonged deployment.

[(2) PARTICIPATION AT ELECTION OF VETERAN.—The participation of a veteran in the pilot program under this section shall be at the election of the veteran.

#### (b) COVERED SERVICES.—The services provided to a woman veteran under the pilot program shall include the following:

[(1) Information on reintegration into the veteran's family, employment, and community.

[(2) Financial counseling.

[(3) Occupational counseling.

[(4) Information and counseling on stress reduction.

[(5) Information and counseling on conflict resolution.

[(6) Such other information and counseling as the Secretary considers appropriate to assist a woman veteran under the pilot program in reintegration into the veteran's family, employment, and community.

[(c) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall carry out the pilot program at not fewer than three locations selected by the Secretary for purposes of the pilot program.]

[(d) TERMINATION.—The authority to carry out a pilot program under this section shall terminate on December 31, 2017.]

[(e) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the completion of the pilot program, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program. The report shall contain the findings and conclusions of the Secretary as a result of the pilot program, and shall include such recommendations for the continuation or expansion of the pilot program as the Secretary considers appropriate.]

[(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for each of fiscal years 2010, 2011, 2015, 2016, and 2017, \$2,000,000 to carry out the pilot program.]

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