

108TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# H. R. 2379

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve access to health care for rural veterans, and for other purposes.

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 5, 2003

Mr. OSBORNE introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve access to health care for rural veterans, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Rural Veterans Access  
5 to Care Act of 2003”.

6 **SEC. 2. IMPROVED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR RURAL**  
7 **VETERANS.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—(1) Chapter 17 of title 38, United  
9 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-  
10 lowing new section:

1 **“§ 1730A. Access to care for rural veterans**

2       “(a) The Secretary shall ensure that funds allocated  
3 pursuant to subsection (b) are used in accordance with  
4 that subsection to improve access to medical services for  
5 highly rural or geographically remote veterans by using  
6 the contract authority of section 1703 of this title and  
7 other authorities available to the Secretary to improve  
8 such access to care.

9       “(b)(1) The Secretary shall provide that, of the  
10 amounts made available for any fiscal year for the Medical  
11 Care appropriation for the Department, not less than 5  
12 percent shall be available only for treatment of veterans  
13 described in subsection (c) for—

14               “(A) acute or chronic symptom management;

15               “(B) nontherapeutic medical services; and

16               “(C) other medical services as determined ap-  
17 propriate in the case of any veteran by the director  
18 of the appropriate geographic service region of the  
19 Department, after consultation with the Department  
20 physician responsible for primary care of the vet-  
21 eran.

22       “(2) In the allocation of such percentage of funds to  
23 geographic service regions of the Department, such funds  
24 for any fiscal year shall initially be allocated in an iden-  
25 tical percentage to each such service region. However,  
26 upon a determination by the Secretary that a particular

1 service region will not use all of the funds so allocated  
2 for a fiscal year for highly rural or geographically remote  
3 veterans, the Secretary shall reallocate those funds to one  
4 or more other service regions, to be available only for  
5 treatment of veterans described in subsection (c) for pur-  
6 poses described in paragraph (1).

7 “(c) Veterans referred to in subsection (b)(1) as de-  
8 scribed in this subsection are veterans—

9 “(1) who are enrolled in the veterans health  
10 care system under section 1705 of this title or have  
11 a service-connected disability; and

12 “(2) who, pursuant to subsection (e), are con-  
13 sidered to be highly rural or geographically remote  
14 veterans.

15 “(d) After the end of the third fiscal year during  
16 which this section is in effect, the Secretary shall review  
17 the operation of this section and, if the Secretary deter-  
18 mines that an adjustment in the percentage in effect  
19 under subsection (b)(1) is necessary, shall recommend to  
20 Congress an adjustment to such percentage. The Sec-  
21 retary shall include with any such recommendation a rec-  
22 ommendation as to whether the Secretary should have the  
23 authority to apply the overall percentage through the use  
24 of different percentages for the various geographic service  
25 regions of the Department.

1       “(e) The Secretary shall prescribe by regulation the  
2 veterans considered to be highly rural or geographically  
3 remote veterans for the purposes of this section. The Sec-  
4 retary shall include as such a veteran any veteran for  
5 whom the driving time to reach a Department health-care  
6 facility is 60 minutes or greater. The Secretary may pro-  
7 vide for a lesser driving time in the case of any veteran  
8 if the Secretary determines that a driving time of 60 min-  
9 utes or greater imposes a hardship on such veteran or oth-  
10 erwise is in the best interest of the veteran.”.

11       (2) The table of sections at the beginning of such  
12 chapter is amended by adding at the end the following  
13 new item:

“1730A. Access to care for rural veterans.”.

14       (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—Section 1730A of title 38,  
15 United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall take  
16 effect beginning with funds appropriated for fiscal year  
17 2005.

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