

109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2306

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs for outreach to veterans and their family members, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 11, 2005

Mr. STRICKLAND (for himself, Mr. DINGELL, Mr. CASE, Mr. GUTIERREZ, Mr. FILNER, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, Ms. BORDALLO, Mr. CARDOZA, Mr. TOWNS, Mr. SALAZAR, Mr. BROWN of Ohio, Mrs. CHRISTENSEN, Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, Mr. HOLDEN, Mr. WYNN, Mr. SHERMAN, Mr. HONDA, Ms. HERSETH, and Mr. RUPPERSBERGER) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs for outreach to veterans and their family members, 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 “Veterans Outreach Act
5 of 2005”.

1 **SEC. 2. RESCISSION OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
2 **FAIRS MEMORANDUM.**

3 (a) RESCISSION OF MEMORANDUM.—The memo-
4 randum of the Department of Veterans Affairs dated July
5 18, 2002, from the Deputy Under Secretary for Health
6 for Operations and Management with the subject “Status
7 of VHA Enrollment and Associated Issues” is hereby re-
8 scinded. Marketing activities of directors of health service
9 networks (known as “Veterans Integrated Service Net-
10 works”) of the Department of Veterans Affairs to enroll
11 new veterans within their respective networks shall be car-
12 ried out without regard to such memorandum.

13 (b) FUNDING LIMITATION.—No funds available to
14 the Department of Veterans Affairs may be used to carry
15 out the memorandum referred to in subsection (a) or oth-
16 erwise to implement the policy contained in that memo-
17 randum.

18 **SEC. 3. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES.**

19 (a) ANNUAL PLAN REQUIRED.—Subchapter II of
20 chapter 77 of title 38, United States Code, is amended
21 by adding at the end the following new sections:

22 **“§ 7728. Annual plan on outreach activities**

23 “(a) ANNUAL PLAN REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall
24 prepare each year a plan for the outreach activities of the
25 Department for the following year.

1 “(b) ELEMENTS.—Each annual plan under sub-
2 section (a) shall include the following:

3 “(1) Plans for efforts to identify veterans who
4 are not enrolled or registered with the Department
5 for benefits or services under the programs adminis-
6 tered by the Secretary.

7 “(2) Plans for informing veterans and their de-
8 pendants of modifications of the benefits and serv-
9 ices under the programs administered by the Sec-
10 retary, including eligibility for medical and nursing
11 care and services.

12 “(c) COORDINATION IN DEVELOPMENT.—In devel-
13 oping an annual plan under subsection (a), the Secretary
14 shall consult with the following:

15 “(1) Directors or other appropriate officials of
16 organizations recognized by the Secretary under sec-
17 tion 5902 of this title.

18 “(2) Directors or other appropriate officials of
19 State and local education and training programs.

20 “(3) The Administration on Aging of the De-
21 partment of Health and Human Services.

22 “(4) Representatives of nongovernmental orga-
23 nizations that carry out veterans outreach programs.

24 “(5) Representatives of State and local veterans
25 employment organizations.

1 “(6) Businesses and professional organizations.

2 “(7) Other individuals and organizations that
3 assist veterans in adjusting to civilian life.

4 “(d) INCORPORATION OF ASSESSMENT OF PREVIOUS
5 ANNUAL PLANS.—In developing an annual plan under
6 subsection (a), the Secretary shall take into account the
7 lessons learned from the implementation of previous an-
8 nual plans under that subsection and program evaluations
9 from the Office of Policy, Planning, and Preparedness of
10 the Department.

11 **“§ 7729. Outreach activities: coordination of activities**
12 **within Department**

13 “(a) The Secretary shall establish and maintain pro-
14 cedures for ensuring the effective coordination of the out-
15 reach activities of the Department between and among the
16 following:

17 “(1) The Office of the Secretary.

18 “(2) The Office of Public Affairs.

19 “(3) The Veterans Health Administration.

20 “(4) The Veterans Benefits Administration.

21 “(5) The National Cemetery Administration.

22 “(b) The Secretary shall—

23 “(1) periodically review the procedures main-
24 tained under subsection (a) for the purpose of ensur-

1 ing that such procedures meet the requirement in
2 that subsection; and

3 “(2) make such modifications to such proce-
4 dures as the Secretary considers appropriate in light
5 of such review in order to better achieve that pur-
6 pose.”.

7 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
8 at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting
9 after the item relating to section 7727 the following new
10 items:

 “7728. Annual plan on outreach activities.

 “7729. Outreach activities: coordination of activities within Department.”.

11 (c) INITIAL ANNUAL PLAN.—The first annual out-
12 reach activities plan under section 7728 of title 38, United
13 States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall be prepared
14 for the first year beginning after the date of the enactment
15 of this Act.

16 **SEC. 4. REQUIREMENT FOR OUTREACH EFFORTS AND**
17 **DEDICATED STAFF AT EACH REGIONAL OF-**
18 **FICE.**

19 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress and the Department of
20 Veterans Affairs historically have targeted certain specific
21 populations for outreach efforts concerning benefits under
22 laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
23 Groups currently targeted for such outreach efforts and
24 for which program outreach coordinators have been des-

1 ignated at each regional office of the Department of Vet-
2 erans Affairs are the following:

- 3 (1) Former prisoners of war.
- 4 (2) Women veterans.
- 5 (3) Minority veterans.
- 6 (4) Active duty personnel.
- 7 (5) Homeless veterans.
- 8 (6) Elderly veterans.
- 9 (7) Recently separated veterans.

10 (b) ELIGIBLE DEPENDENT DEFINED.—Paragraph
11 (2) of section 7721(b) of title 38, United States Code, is
12 amended to read as follows:

13 “(2) the term ‘eligible dependent’ means a
14 spouse, surviving spouse (whether or not remarried),
15 child (regardless of age or marital status), or parent
16 of a person who served in the active military, naval,
17 or air service.”.

18 (c) IMPROVED OUTREACH PROGRAM.—Section 7727
19 of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as
20 follows:

21 **“§ 7727. Outreach for eligible dependents**

22 “(a) In carrying out this subchapter, the Secretary
23 shall ensure that the needs of eligible dependents are fully
24 addressed.

1 “(b)(1) In order to carry out subsection (a), the Sec-
2 retary shall assign such employees of the Veterans Bene-
3 fits Administration as the Secretary considers appropriate
4 to conduct outreach programs and provide outreach serv-
5 ices for eligible dependents. In areas where the number
6 of eligible dependents warrant doing so, the Secretary
7 shall assign at least one employee in the Veterans Benefits
8 Administration regional office to serve as a full-time coor-
9 dinator of outreach programs and services for eligible de-
10 pendents in that region.

11 “(2) Responsibilities of employees assigned to out-
12 reach functions under paragraph (1) shall include pro-
13 viding eligible dependents with—

14 “(A) information about benefits under laws ad-
15 ministered by the Secretary; and

16 “(B) contacting responsible regional office em-
17 ployees to facilitate—

18 “(i) assistance in claims preparation and
19 inquiry resolution; and

20 “(ii) in the case of a dependent of a de-
21 ceased veteran for whom necessary records are
22 incomplete, assistance in obtaining such records
23 and other necessary information concerning the
24 veteran.

1 “(c)(1) Information provided an eligible dependent
2 under this section shall include information on how to
3 apply for benefits for which the dependent may be eligible,
4 including information about assistance available under
5 subsection (b) and section 7722(d) of this title.

6 “(2) In the case of eligible dependents who are mem-
7 bers of distinct beneficiary populations (such as survivors
8 of deceased veterans), the Secretary shall ensure that in-
9 formation provided under this section includes specific in-
10 formation about benefits relating to that population.

11 “(d) For any geographic area in which there is a sig-
12 nificant population of eligible dependents whose primary
13 language is a language other than English, the Secretary
14 shall make information provided under this subsection
15 available to those dependents in the dominant language
16 in that area (in addition to English).

17 “(e) Outreach services and assistance shall be pro-
18 vided for eligible dependents through the same means that
19 are used for other specially targeted groups.

20 “(f) The Secretary shall ensure that the availability
21 of outreach services and assistance for eligible dependents
22 under this subchapter is made known through a variety
23 of means, including the Internet, correspondence of the
24 Department, announcements in veterans publications, an-
25 nouncements to the media, telephone directories, direct

1 correspondence to congressional offices, military bases,
2 public affairs offices, military retiree affairs offices, and
3 United States embassies.

4 “(g) The Secretary shall support the Department’s
5 periodic evaluation under section 527 of this title con-
6 cerning the Department’s efforts to address the needs of
7 eligible dependents.

8 “(h) The Secretary shall include in the Secretary’s
9 annual report under section 529 of this title an assessment
10 of the programs of the Department addressing the infor-
11 mation and assistance needs of veterans and eligible de-
12 pendents. The Secretary shall include in each such report
13 the following:

14 “(1) Information about expenditures, costs, and
15 workload under the program of the Department di-
16 rected towards the information and assistance needs
17 of veterans and eligible dependents.

18 “(2) Information about outreach efforts di-
19 rected toward veterans and eligible dependents.

20 “(3) Information about emerging needs within
21 the program that relate to other provisions of law,
22 including section 7725 of this title with respect to
23 language needs of veterans and eligible dependents.

24 “(4) Information as to the timeline for imple-
25 mentation of improvements to meet existing and

- 1 emerging needs of veterans and eligible dependents
- 2 in addition to those specified in this section.”.

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