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109TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 716

AN ACT

To amend title 38, United States Code, to enhance services provided by vet centers, to clarify and improve the provision of bereavement counseling by the Department of Veterans Affairs, 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.

This Act may be cited as the ''Vet Center Enhancement Act of 2005''.

SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF OUTREACH ACTIVITIES OF VET CENTERS.

(a) ADDITIONAL OUTREACH WORKERS.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall employ not more than 50 veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom for the purpose of providing outreach to veterans on the availability of readjustment counseling and related mental health services for veterans under section 1712A of title 38, United States Code.

(b) CONSTRUCTION WITH CURRENT OUTREACH PROGRAM.—The veterans employed under subsection (a) are in addition to any veterans employed by the Secretary for the purpose described in that subsection under the February 2004 program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide outreach described in that subsection.

(c) ASSIGNMENT TO VET CENTERS.—The Secretary may assign any veteran employed under subsection (a) to any vet center that the Secretary considers appropriate in order to meet the purpose described in that subsection.

(d) INAPPLICABILITY AND TERMINATION OF LIMITATION ON DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT.—Any limitation on the duration of employment of veterans under the program described in subsection (b) is hereby terminated, and shall not apply to veterans employed under such program or under this section.

(e) EMPLOYMENT STATUS.—Veterans employed under subsection (a) shall be employed in career conditional status, which is the employment status in which veterans are employed under the program described in subsection (b).

(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) VET CENTER.—The term ''vet center'' means a center for the provision of readjustment counseling and related mental health services under section 1712A of title 38, United States Code.

(2) VETERAN OF OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM OR OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.—The term ''veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom'' means any veteran who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom.

SEC. 3. CLARIFICATION AND ENHANCEMENT OF BEREAVEMENT COUNSELING.

(a) CLARIFICATION OF MEMBERS OF IMMEDIATE FAMILY ELIGIBLE FOR COUNSELING.—Subsection (b) of section 1783 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by inserting ''(1)'' before ''The Secretary''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

''(2) For purposes of this subsection, the members of the immediate family of a member of the Armed Forces described in paragraph (1) include the parents of such member.''.

(b) PROVISION OF COUNSELING THROUGH VET CENTERS.—Such section is further amended—

(1) by redesignating subsection (c) as subsection (d); and

(2) by inserting after subsection (b) the following new subsection (c):

''(c) PROVISION OF COUNSELING THROUGH VET CENTERS.—Bereavement counseling may be provided under this section through the facilities and personnel of centers for the provision of readjustment counseling and related mental health services under section 1712A of this title.''.

SEC. 4. FUNDING FOR VET CENTER PROGRAM.

There is authorized to be appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2006, $180,000,000 for the provision of readjustment counseling and related mental health services through centers under section 1712A of title 38, United States Code, including

for the discharge of the requirements of this Act (and the amendments made by this Act).

Passed the Senate December 22 (legislative day, December 21), 2005.

Attest:

Secretary.

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