

110TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 1527

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

Received; read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

AN ACT

To amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a pilot program to permit certain highly rural veterans enrolled in the health system of the Department of Veterans Affairs to receive covered health services through providers other than those of the Department.

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”.

6 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM OF ENHANCED CONTRACT CARE**

7 **AUTHORITY FOR HEALTH CARE NEEDS OF**
8 **VETERANS IN HIGHLY RURAL AREAS.**

9 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1703 of title 38, United
10 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
11 lowing new subsection:

12 “(e)(1) The Secretary shall conduct a pilot program
13 which permits highly rural veterans—

14 “(A) who are enrolled in the system of patient
15 enrollment established under section 1705(a) of this
16 title, and

17 “(B) who reside within Veterans Integrated
18 Service Network 1, 15, 18, and 19,

19 to elect to receive covered health services for which such
20 veterans are eligible through a non-Department health-
21 care provider.

22 “(2) The election under paragraph (1) shall be made
23 by submitting an application to the Secretary in accord-
24 ance with such regulations as the Secretary prescribes.

25 The Secretary shall authorize such services to be furnished

1 to the veteran pursuant to contracting with such a pro-
2 vider to furnish such services to such veteran.

3 “(3) For purposes of this subsection, a highly rural
4 veteran is one who—

5 “(A) resides in a location that is—

6 “(i) more than 60 miles driving distance
7 from the nearest Department health-care facil-
8 ity providing primary care services, if the vet-
9 eran is seeking such services;

10 “(ii) more than 120 miles driving distance
11 from the nearest Department health-care facil-
12 ity providing acute hospital care, if the veteran
13 is seeking such care; or

14 “(iii) more than 240 miles driving distance
15 from the nearest Department health-care facil-
16 ity providing tertiary care, if the veteran is
17 seeking such care; or

18 “(B) in the case of a veteran who resides in a
19 location less than the distance indicated in clause
20 (i), (ii), or (iii) of subparagraph (A), as applicable,
21 experiences such hardship or other difficulties in
22 travel to the nearest appropriate Department health-
23 care facility that such travel is not in the best inter-
24 est of the veteran, as determined by the Secretary

1 pursuant to regulations prescribed for purposes of
2 this subsection.

3 “(4) For purposes of this subsection, a covered health
4 service is any hospital care, medical service, rehabilitative
5 service, or preventative health service authorized to be pro-
6 vided by the Secretary under this chapter or any other
7 provision of law.

8 “(5) For purposes of this subsection, a health-care
9 provider is any qualified entity or individual furnishing a
10 covered health service.

11 “(6) In meeting the requirements of this subsection,
12 the Secretary shall develop the functional capability to
13 provide for the exchange of medical information between
14 the Department and non-Department health-care pro-
15 viders.

16 “(7) This subsection shall apply to covered health
17 services provided during the 3-year period beginning on
18 the 120th day after the date of the enactment of this sub-
19 section.

20 “(8) Not later than the 30th day after the close of
21 each year of the period described in paragraph (7), the
22 Secretary shall submit a report to the Committees of Vet-
23 erans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives and the
24 Senate a report which includes—

1 “(A) the Secretary’s assessment of the program
2 under this subsection, including its cost, volume,
3 quality, patient satisfaction, benefit to veterans, and
4 any other findings and conclusions of the Secretary
5 with respect to such program, and

6 “(B) any recommendations that the Secretary
7 may have for—

8 “(i) continuing the program,
9 “(ii) extending the program to other or all
10 service regions of the Department, and
11 “(iii) making the program permanent.”.

12 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The Secretary of Veterans
13 Affairs shall implement the amendment made by sub-
14 section (a) not later than the 120th day after the date
15 of the enactment of this Act.

Passed the House of Representatives September 10,
2008.

Attest:

LORRAINE C. MILLER,

Clerk.