

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1541

To provide support and assistance for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve who are undergoing deployment, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 15, 2007

Mr. BRALEY of Iowa (for himself, Mr. LOEBSACK, and Mr. BOSWELL) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Armed Services, and in addition to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To provide support and assistance for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve who are undergoing deployment, 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; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Coming Together for Guard and Reserve Families Act”.

6 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for
7 this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Findings.

Sec. 3. Family support for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve undergoing deployment.

Sec. 4. Pilot program on family-to-family support for families of members of the National Guard and Reserve undergoing deployment.

Sec. 5. Support services for children, infants, and toddlers of members of the National Guard and Reserve undergoing deployment.

Sec. 6. Mental health services for family members of disabled members of the National Guard and Reserve.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress makes the following findings:

3 (1) More than 700,000 children have had a
4 parent deployed overseas as a member of the Armed
5 Forces since September 11, 2001, and more than
6 such 2,700 children have had a parent killed in Iraq
7 or Afghanistan.

8 (2) Forty-one percent of the members of the
9 National Guard and Reserve who have been deployed
10 overseas report mental health symptoms within three
11 to six months of returning home from deployment,
12 compared with 32 percent of the members of the
13 regular military who have been so deployed. Fifteen
14 percent of the members of the National Guard and
15 Reserve have been identified as at risk for post traumatic
16 stress disorder (PTSD), compared with 9 per-
17 cent of the members of the regular military. Re-
18 search suggests that increased stress in the family
19 can trigger symptoms of post traumatic stress dis-
20 order.

1 (3) Military families face significant challenges
2 throughout the deployment cycle of members of the
3 Armed Forces. Families of members of the National
4 Guard and Reserve are particularly vulnerable be-
5 cause of their distance from military bases and their
6 lack of access to the services upon which military
7 families typically draw. In addition, many families of
8 members of the National Guard and Reserve are
9 currently experiencing multiple extended deploy-
10 ments, and do not have the necessary support avail-
11 able to them.

12 (4) Uncertainty and separation can create high
13 levels of stress for parents, spouses, and children.
14 Stress can put children at greater risk for behavioral
15 problems, academic difficulties, anxiety, and depres-
16 sion. Family separations many times result in mar-
17 ital problems, financial difficulties, and stress on
18 family relationships.

19 (5) Research suggests that military families
20 who receive community and social support while
21 members of the National Guard and Reserve are un-
22 dergoing deployment have the most positive out-
23 comes. Supporting families and children affected by
24 deployment can ease transitional stress, help mem-
25 bers of the National Guard and Reserve and their

1 families cope during and after deployment, prevent
2 mental health problems, and assist in a smooth tran-
3 sition of members of the National Guard and Re-
4 serve back to civilian life.

5 **SEC. 3. FAMILY SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF MEMBERS OF**
6 **THE NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE UN-**
7 **DERGOING DEPLOYMENT.**

8 (a) FAMILY SUPPORT.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
10 shall enhance and improve current programs of the
11 Department of Defense to provide family support for
12 families of members of the National Guard and Re-
13 serve in order to improve the assistance available for
14 families of members of the National Guard and Re-
15 serve who are deployed throughout their deployment
16 cycle.

17 (2) SPECIFIC ENHANCEMENTS.—In enhancing
18 and improving programs under paragraph (1), the
19 Secretary shall enhance and improve the availability
20 of the following:

21 (A) Support staff to assist families of the
22 members of the National Guard and Reserve
23 who are deployed throughout their deployment
24 cycle, including staff to assist such families
25 in—

1 (i) preparing and updating family care
2 plans; and

3 (ii) securing information on health
4 care benefits and services and on other
5 community resources.

6 (B) Support staff to provide referrals for
7 such families for—

8 (i) crisis services; and

9 (ii) marriage counseling and family
10 counseling.

11 (b) POST-DEPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR SPOUSES
12 AND PARENTS OF RETURNING MEMBERS.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
14 shall provide spouses and parents of members of the
15 National Guard and Reserve who are returning from
16 deployment assistance in—

17 (A) understanding issues that arise in the
18 readjustment of such members to civilian life;

19 (B) identifying signs and symptoms of
20 mental health issues; and

21 (C) encouraging such members and their
22 families in seeking assistance for such issues.

23 (2) INFORMATION ON AVAILABLE RE-
24 SOURCES.—In providing assistance under paragraph
25 (1), the Secretary shall provide information on local

1 resources for mental health services, family coun-
2 seling services, or other appropriate services, includ-
3 ing services available from both military providers of
4 such services and community-base providers of such
5 services.

6 (3) TIMING.—The Secretary shall provide re-
7 sources under paragraph (1) with respect to a mem-
8 ber of the National Guard or Reserve returning from
9 deployment approximately six months after the date
10 of the return of such member from deployment.

11 (c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
12 hereby authorized to be appropriated for the Department
13 of Defense for fiscal year 2008, \$4,000,000 to carry out
14 this section.

15 **SEC. 4. PILOT PROGRAM ON FAMILY-TO-FAMILY SUPPORT**
16 **FOR FAMILIES OF MEMBERS OF THE NA-**
17 **TIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE UNDERGOING**
18 **DEPLOYMENT.**

19 (a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
21 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
22 and Human Services, carry out a pilot program to—

23 (A) assess the effectiveness of family-to-
24 family support programs in—

1 (i) the early identification and preven-
2 tion of family problems for families of
3 members of the National Guard and Re-
4 serve who are deployed;

5 (ii) the provision of peer support for
6 such families;

7 (iii) reducing adverse outcomes for
8 children of such families, including poor
9 academic performance, behavioral prob-
10 lems, and the adverse consequence of
11 stress and anxiety; and

12 (iv) improving family readiness and
13 post-deployment transition for such fami-
14 lies; and

15 (B) assess the feasibility and advisability
16 of utilizing spouses of members of the Armed
17 Forces to act as counselors for spouses and
18 families of members of the National Guard and
19 Reserve who are deployed in order to assist
20 such spouses and families in coping with the de-
21 ployment of such members throughout their de-
22 ployment cycle.

23 (2) CONSTRUCTION WITH OTHER ASSIST-
24 ANCE.—The pilot program shall be in addition to

1 any assistance programs carried out by the Sec-
2 retary of Defense.

3 (b) COUNSELING DUTIES.—The duties of spouses
4 who act as counselors under the pilot program shall in-
5 clude—

6 (1) the provision of assistance to spouses and
7 families of members of the National Guard and Re-
8 serve who are deployed with respect to family readi-
9 ness, health care, and crisis referral; and

10 (2) the provision of outreach to such spouses
11 and families on mental health matters such as mar-
12 riage and family counseling.

13 (c) TRAINING IN COUNSELING.—In carrying out the
14 pilot program, the Secretary shall provide appropriate
15 training to spouses who act as counselors under the pilot
16 program, including training on the matters set forth in
17 clauses (i) through (iv) of subsection (a)(1)(A).

18 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
19 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense
20 shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program.
21 The report shall include—

22 (1) a description of the activities under the pilot
23 program;

1 (2) an assessment of the effectiveness of family-
2 to-family support programs in achieving the results
3 set forth in subsection (a)(1)(A);

4 (3) an assessment of the feasibility and advis-
5 ability of utilizing spouses of members of the Armed
6 Forces to act as counselors as described in sub-
7 section (a)(1)(B); and

8 (4) such other matters as the Secretary con-
9 siders appropriate in light of the pilot program.

10 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
11 hereby authorized to be appropriated for the Department
12 of Defense for fiscal year 2008, \$1,000,000 to carry out
13 this section.

14 **SEC. 5. SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN, INFANTS, AND**
15 **TODDLERS OF MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL**
16 **GUARD AND RESERVE UNDERGOING DEPLOY-**
17 **MENT.**

18 (a) ENHANCEMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR
19 CHILDREN.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
21 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
22 and Human Services, enter into a contract or other
23 agreement with a private sector entity having exper-
24 tise in the health and well-being of families and chil-
25 dren in order to enhance and develop support serv-

1 ices for children of members of the National Guard
2 and Reserve who are deployed.

3 (2) SUPPORT SERVICES.—In enhancing and de-
4 veloping support services pursuant to paragraph (1),
5 the entity referred to in that paragraph shall—

6 (A) develop materials for parents and
7 other caretakers of children of members of the
8 National Guard and Reserve who are deployed
9 to assist such parents and caretakers in re-
10 sponding to the adverse implications of such de-
11 ployment (and the death or injury of such mem-
12 bers during such deployment) for such children,
13 including the role such parents and caretakers
14 can play in addressing and mitigating such im-
15 plications;

16 (B) develop programs and activities to in-
17 crease awareness throughout the military and
18 civilian communities of the adverse implications
19 of such deployment (and the death or injury of
20 such members during such deployment) for
21 such children and their families and to increase
22 collaboration within such communities to ad-
23 dress and mitigate such implications;

24 (C) develop training for early child care
25 and education, mental health, health care, and

1 family support professionals to enhance the
2 awareness of such professionals of their role in
3 assisting families in addressing and mitigating
4 the adverse implications of such deployment
5 (and the death or injury of such members dur-
6 ing such deployment) for such children; and

7 (D) conduct research on best practices for
8 building psychological and emotional resiliency
9 in such children in coping with the deployment
10 of such members.

11 (b) ENHANCEMENT OF SUPPORT SERVICES FOR IN-
12 FANTS AND TODDLERS.—

13 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Defense
14 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
15 and Human Services, enter into a contract or other
16 agreement with a private sector entity having exper-
17 tise in the health and well-being of infants and tod-
18 dlers in order to enhance and develop support serv-
19 ices to address the special needs of infants and tod-
20 dlers of members of the National Guard and Reserve
21 who are deployed.

22 (2) SUPPORT SERVICES.—In enhancing and de-
23 veloping support services pursuant to paragraph (1),
24 the entity referred to in that paragraph shall—

1 (A) develop materials for parents and
2 other caretakers of infants and toddlers of
3 members of the National Guard and Reserve
4 who are deployed to assist such parents and
5 caretakers in responding to the adverse implica-
6 tions of such deployment (and the death or in-
7 jury of such members during such deployment)
8 for such infants and toddlers, including the role
9 such parents and caretakers can play in ad-
10 dressing and mitigating such implications;

11 (B) develop programs and activities to in-
12 crease awareness throughout the military and
13 civilian communities of the adverse implications
14 of such deployment (and the death or injury of
15 such members during such deployment) for
16 such infants and toddlers and their families and
17 to increase collaboration within such commu-
18 nities to address and mitigate such implica-
19 tions;

20 (C) develop training for education, mental
21 health, health care, and family support profes-
22 sionals to enhance the awareness of such pro-
23 fessionals of their role in assisting families in
24 addressing and mitigating the adverse implica-
25 tions of such deployment (and the death or in-

1 jury of such members during such deployment)
2 for such infants and toddlers; and

3 (D) conduct research on best practices for
4 building psychological and emotional resiliency
5 in the families of such infants and toddlers in
6 coping with the deployment of such members.

7 (c) REPORTS.—

8 (1) REPORTS REQUIRED.—At the end of the
9 18-month period beginning on the date of the enact-
10 ment of this Act, and at the end of the 36-month
11 period beginning on that date, each entity with
12 which the Secretary of Defense enters into a con-
13 tract or agreement under subsection (a) or (b) shall
14 submit to the Secretary, and to Congress, a report
15 on the activities of such entity under such contract.

16 (2) ELEMENTS.—Each report under paragraph
17 (1) shall include the following:

18 (A) An assessment of the extent to which
19 outreach to parents and other caretakers of
20 children, or infants and toddlers, as applicable,
21 of members of the National Guard and Reserve
22 was effective in reaching such parents and care-
23 takers and in mitigating the adverse effects of
24 the deployment of such members on such chil-
25 dren or infants and toddlers.

1 (B) An assessment of the effectiveness of
2 the programs and activities under such contract
3 in increasing collaboration and service provision
4 in community agencies serving family members
5 of the National Guard and Reserve undergoing
6 deployment.

7 (C) An assessment of the effectiveness of
8 training materials for education, mental health,
9 health, and family support professionals devel-
10 oped under such contract in increasing aware-
11 ness of their role in assisting families in ad-
12 dressing and mitigating the adverse effects on
13 children, or infants and toddlers, of the deploy-
14 ment of members of the National Guard and
15 Reserve.

16 (D) A description of best practices identi-
17 fied under such contract for building psycho-
18 logical and emotional resiliency in children, or
19 infants and toddlers, in coping with the deploy-
20 ment of members of the National Guard and
21 Reserve.

22 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

23 (1) SUPPORT SERVICES FOR CHILDREN.—There
24 is hereby authorized to be appropriated for the De-

1 partment of Defense for fiscal year 2008,
2 \$6,000,000 to carry out subsection (a).

3 (2) SUPPORT SERVICES FOR INFANTS AND TOD-
4 DLERS.—There is hereby authorized to be appro-
5 priated for the Department of Defense for fiscal
6 year 2008, \$6,000,000 to carry out subsection (b).

7 **SEC. 6. MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR FAMILY MEMBERS**
8 **OF DISABLED MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL**
9 **GUARD AND RESERVE.**

10 (a) EXPANSION OF AVAILABILITY OF MENTAL
11 HEALTH SERVICES.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
13 Affairs and the Secretary of Defense shall jointly
14 take appropriate actions to expand and enhance ac-
15 cess to mental health services for family members of
16 members and former members of the National
17 Guard and Reserve who are disabled during military
18 service.

19 (2) SERVICES.—Access to mental health serv-
20 ices shall be expanded under paragraph (1) by the
21 provision of mental health services through the fol-
22 lowing:

23 (A) Community-based outpatient clinics of
24 the Department of Veterans Affairs staffed by
25 personnel of the Department.

1 (B) Referral to appropriate facilities of the
2 Department of Veterans Affairs for the receipt
3 of such services.

4 (C) Referral to appropriate mental health
5 professionals in the community for receipt of
6 such services.

7 (D) Providers of telemental health services.

8 (3) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

9 There is hereby authorized to be appropriated for
10 the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year
11 2008, \$8,000,000 to carry out this section.

12 (b) COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT ON ACCESS TO
13 MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES THROUGH TRICARE.—

14 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
15 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
16 Comptroller General of the United States shall sub-
17 mit to Congress a report on barriers to access to
18 mental health services through the TRICARE pro-
19 gram, including the number of mental health serv-
20 ices providers under the TRICARE program that
21 are located more than 40 miles from a military in-
22 stallation.

23 (2) RECOMMENDATIONS.—The report under
24 paragraph (1) shall include recommendations for—

1 (A) increasing access to mental health
2 services providers under the TRICARE pro-
3 gram for members of the National Guard and
4 their families; and

5 (B) increasing the number of mental
6 health services providers under the TRICARE
7 program in areas located more than 40 miles
8 from a military installation.

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