

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1146

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve health care for veterans who live in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 18, 2007

Mr. SALAZAR (for himself, Mr. THUNE, Mr. TESTER, Mr. BURR, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. WYDEN, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. PRYOR, Mr. ENZI, Mrs. LINCOLN, Ms. SNOWE, Mr. KERRY, Mr. BINGAMAN, Mr. SMITH, Mr. BAUCUS, and Mr. DORGAN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve health care for veterans who live in rural areas, 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 Health
5 Care Improvement Act of 2007”.

1 **SEC. 2. TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT FOR VETERANS RECEIV-**
 2 **ING TREATMENT AT FACILITIES OF THE DE-**
 3 **PARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

4 Section 111 of title 38, United States Code, is
 5 amended—

6 (1) in subsection (a)—

7 (A) by striking “subsistence),” and insert-
 8 ing “subsistence at a rate equivalent to the rate
 9 provided to Federal employees under section
 10 5702 of title 5),”; and

11 (B) by striking “traveled,” and inserting
 12 “(at a rate equivalent to the rate provided to
 13 Federal employees under section 5704 of title
 14 5),”;

15 (2) by striking subsection (g); and

16 (3) by redesignating subsection (h) as sub-
 17 section (g).

18 **SEC. 3. CENTERS FOR RURAL HEALTH RESEARCH, EDU-**
 19 **CATION, AND CLINICAL ACTIVITIES.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter II of chapter 73 of
 21 title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the
 22 end the following new section:

23 **“§ 7330A. Centers for rural health research, edu-**
 24 **cation, and clinical activities**

25 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT OF CENTERS.—The Secretary,
 26 through the Director of the Office of Rural Health, shall

1 establish and operate not less than one and not more than
2 five centers of excellence for rural health research, edu-
3 cation, and clinical activities, which shall—

4 “(1) conduct research on the provision of health
5 services in rural areas;

6 “(2) develop specific models to be used by the
7 Department in furnishing health services to veterans
8 in rural areas;

9 “(3) provide education and training for health
10 care professionals of the Department on the fur-
11 nishing of health services to veterans in rural areas;
12 and

13 “(4) develop and implement innovative clinical
14 activities and systems of care for the Department
15 for the furnishing of health services to veterans in
16 rural areas.

17 “(b) GEOGRAPHIC DISPERSION.—The Secretary shall
18 ensure that the centers authorized under this section are
19 located at health care facilities that are geographically dis-
20 persed throughout the United States.

21 “(c) SELECTION CRITERIA.—The Secretary may not
22 designate a health care facility as a location for a center
23 under this section unless—

24 “(1) the peer review panel established under
25 subsection (d) determines that the proposal sub-

1 mitted by such facility meets the highest competitive
2 standards of scientific and clinical merit; and

3 “(2) the Secretary determines that the facility
4 has, or may reasonably be anticipated to develop, the
5 following:

6 “(A) An arrangement with an accredited
7 medical school to provide residents with edu-
8 cation and training in health services for vet-
9 erans in rural areas.

10 “(B) The ability to attract the participa-
11 tion of scientists who are capable of ingenuity
12 and creativity in health care research efforts.

13 “(C) A policymaking advisory committee,
14 composed of appropriate health care and re-
15 search representatives of the facility and of the
16 affiliated school or schools, to advise the direc-
17 tors of such facility and such center on policy
18 matters pertaining to the activities of such cen-
19 ter during the period of the operation of such
20 center.

21 “(D) The capability to conduct effectively
22 evaluations of the activities of such center.

23 “(d) PANEL TO EVALUATE PROPOSALS.—(1) The
24 Director of the Office of Rural Health shall establish a
25 panel—

1 “(A) to evaluate the scientific and clinical merit
2 of proposals submitted to establish centers under
3 this section; and

4 “(B) to provide advice to the Director regarding
5 the implementation of this section.

6 “(2) The panel shall review each proposal received
7 from the Secretary and shall submit its views on the rel-
8 ative scientific and clinical merit of each such proposal to
9 the Secretary.

10 “(3) The panel established under paragraph (1) shall
11 be comprised of experts in the fields of public health re-
12 search, education, and clinical care.

13 “(4) Members of the panel shall serve as consultants
14 to the Department for a period not to exceed two years.

15 “(5) The panel shall not be subject to the Federal
16 Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.).

17 “(e) FUNDING.—(1) There are authorized to be ap-
18 propriated to the Medical Care Account and the Medical
19 and Prosthetics Research Account of the Department of
20 Veterans Affairs such sums as may be necessary for the
21 support of the research and education activities of the cen-
22 ters operated under this section.

23 “(2) There shall be allocated to the centers operated
24 under this section, from amounts authorized to be appro-
25 priated to the Medical Care Account and the Medical and

1 Prosthetics Research Account by paragraph (1), such
 2 amounts as the Under Secretary of health considers ap-
 3 propriate for such centers. Such amounts shall be allo-
 4 cated through the Director of the Office of Rural Health.

5 “(3) Activities of clinical and scientific investigation
 6 at each center operated under this section—

7 “(A) shall be eligible to compete for the award
 8 of funding from funds appropriated for the Medical
 9 and Prosthetics Research Account; and

10 “(B) shall receive priority in the award of fund-
 11 ing from such account to the extent that funds are
 12 awarded to projects for research in the care of rural
 13 veterans.”.

14 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 15 at the beginning of chapter 73 of such title is amended
 16 by inserting after the item relating to section 7330 the
 17 following new item:

“7330A. Centers for rural health research, education, and clinical activities.”.

18 **SEC. 4. TRANSPORTATION GRANTS FOR RURAL VETERANS**
 19 **SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS.**

20 (a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
 22 Affairs shall establish a grant program to provide in-
 23 novative transportation options to veterans in remote
 24 rural areas.

1 (2) USE OF FUNDS.—Grants awarded under
2 this section may be used by State veterans’ service
3 agencies and veterans service organizations to—

4 (A) assist veterans in remote rural areas to
5 travel to Department of Veterans Affairs med-
6 ical centers; and

7 (B) otherwise assist in providing medical
8 care to veterans in remote rural areas.

9 (3) MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—The amount of a
10 grant under this section may not exceed \$50,000.

11 (4) NO MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—The recipi-
12 ent of a grant under this section shall not be re-
13 quired to provide matching funds as a condition for
14 receiving such grant.

15 (b) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe
16 regulations for—

17 (1) evaluating grant applications under this sec-
18 tion; and

19 (2) otherwise administering the program estab-
20 lished by this section.

21 (c) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION DEFINI-
22 TION.—In this section, the term “veterans service organi-
23 zation” means any organization recognized by the Sec-
24 retary of Veterans Affairs for the representation of vet-
25 erans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

1 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
2 are authorized to be appropriated \$3,000,000 for each of
3 fiscal years 2008 through 2012 to carry out this section.

4 **SEC. 5. DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS ON ALTERNATIVES**
5 **FOR EXPANDING CARE FOR VETERANS IN**
6 **RURAL AREAS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
8 fairs, through the Director of the Office of Rural Health,
9 shall carry out demonstration projects to examine alter-
10 natives for expanding care for veterans in rural areas, in-
11 cluding the following:

12 (1) Establishing a partnership between the De-
13 partment of Veterans Affairs and the Centers for
14 Medicare and Medicaid Services of the Department
15 of Health and Human Services to coordinate care
16 for veterans in rural areas at critical access hospitals
17 (as designated or certified under section 1820 of the
18 Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395i–4)).

19 (2) Establishing a partnership between the De-
20 partment of Veterans Affairs and the Department of
21 Health and Human Services to coordinate care for
22 veterans in rural areas at community health centers.

23 (3) Expanding coordination between the De-
24 partment of Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health

1 Service to expand care for Native American vet-
2 erans.

3 (b) GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary of
4 Veterans Affairs shall ensure that the demonstration
5 projects authorized under subsection (a) are located at fa-
6 cilities that are geographically distributed throughout the
7 United States.

8 (c) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date
9 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans
10 Affairs shall submit a report on the results of the dem-
11 onstration projects conducted under subsection (a) to—

12 (1) the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the
13 Committee on Appropriations of the Senate; and

14 (2) the Committee on Veterans' Affairs and the
15 Committee on Appropriations of the House of Rep-
16 resentatives.

17 **SEC. 6. REPORT TO CONGRESS ON MATTERS RELATED TO**
18 **CARE FOR VETERANS WHO LIVE IN RURAL**
19 **AREAS.**

20 (a) ANNUAL REPORT.—The Secretary of Veterans
21 Affairs shall submit to Congress each year, together with
22 documents submitted to Congress in support of the budget
23 of the President for the fiscal year beginning in such year
24 (as submitted pursuant to section 1105 of title 31, United
25 States Code), an assessment, current as of the fiscal year

1 ending in the year before such report is submitted, of the
2 following:

3 (1) The implementation of the provisions of this
4 Act, including the amendments made by this Act.

5 (2) The establishment and function of the Of-
6 fice of Rural Health under section 7308 of title 38,
7 United States Code.

8 (b) ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR INITIAL RE-
9 PORT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to
10 Congress, together with the first report submitted under
11 subsection (a), an assessment of the following:

12 (1) The fee-basis health-care program required
13 by subsection (b) of section 212 of the Veterans
14 Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology
15 Act of 2006 (Public Law 109–461; 120 Stat. 3422).

16 (2) The outreach program required by section
17 213 of such Act.

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