

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.

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## 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

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# 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 Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*
- 2        **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**
- 3        This Act may be cited as the “Rural Veterans Health
- 4        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 inserting  
8 “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.

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

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

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:

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 veterans.  
2

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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