

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 1271

To provide for a comprehensive national research effort on the physical and mental health and other readjustment needs of the members of the Armed Forces and veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and their families.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 2, 2007

Mr. OBAMA (for himself and Mrs. McCASKILL) introduced the following bill;  
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

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## A BILL

To provide for a comprehensive national research effort on the physical and mental health and other readjustment needs of the members of the Armed Forces and veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom and their families.

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 “Homecoming Enhance-  
5       ment Research and Oversight (HERO) Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. STUDY ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND**  
2 **OTHER READJUSTMENT NEEDS OF MEMBERS**  
3 **AND FORMER MEMBERS OF THE ARMED**  
4 **FORCES WHO DEPLOYED IN OPERATION**  
5 **IRAQI FREEDOM AND OPERATION ENDURING**  
6 **FREEDOM AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

7 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress makes the following find-  
8 ings:

9 (1) The order on April 11, 2007 to extend the  
10 tour of duty for members of the Army on active duty  
11 in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring  
12 Freedom to 15 months is placing additional strains  
13 on the wellness of members of the Armed Forces  
14 and their families back home.

15 (2) 20,000 United States troops have been de-  
16 ployed at least 5 times since the war effort began.  
17 70,000 have been deployed at 3 least times.

18 (3) Sixty percent of deployed members of the  
19 Armed Forces have family responsibilities.

20 (4) More than 500,000 children have one or  
21 more parents deployed in support of the Global War  
22 on Terror (GWOT) at any given time.

23 (5) It is estimated that more than 2,700 chil-  
24 dren in the United States have lost a parent in Op-  
25 eration Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Free-  
26 dom.

1           (6) Women now comprise 16 percent of the all  
2       voluntary military force, yet there is a lack of re-  
3       search on the psychological needs and readjustment  
4       concerns of female military personnel.

5           (7) Members of the Armed Forces who have  
6       screened positive for a mental health disorder were  
7       twice as likely as members who have screened nega-  
8       tive for a mental health disorder to report concern  
9       about possible stigmatization and other barriers to  
10      accessing care. Among members of the Armed  
11      Forces who screened positive for a mental health  
12      disorder, only between 23 percent and 40 percent  
13      have sought care.

14          (8) As many as one quarter of all members of  
15      the Armed Forces returning from a combat zone  
16      have less visible psychological injuries.

17          (9) On average, more than 20 percent of  
18      wounded members of the Armed Forces have a  
19      Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

20          (10) More than a decade passed between the  
21      end of the conflict in Vietnam and the publication by  
22      the Federal Government of its landmark study on  
23      the readjustment needs of veterans of that conflict.  
24      The impacts of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan on  
25      members of the Armed Forces, former members of

1 the Armed Forces, and their families must be rigor-  
2 ously researched and addressed without a wait of 10  
3 years.

4 (b) STUDY REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Defense  
5 shall, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Af-  
6 fairs, enter into an agreement with the National Academy  
7 of Sciences for a study on the physical and mental health  
8 and other readjustment needs of members and former  
9 members of the Armed Forces who deployed in Operation  
10 Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and their  
11 families as a result of such deployment.

12 (c) PHASES.—The study required under subsection  
13 (b) shall consist of two phases:

14 (1) A preliminary phase, to be completed not  
15 later than 180 days after the date of the enactment  
16 of this Act—

17 (A) to identify preliminary findings on the  
18 physical and mental health and other readjust-  
19 ment needs described in subsection (b) and on  
20 gaps in care for the members, former members,  
21 and families described in that subsection; and

22 (B) to determine the parameters of the  
23 second phase of the study under paragraph (2).

24 (2) A second phase, to be completed not later  
25 than three years after the date of the enactment of

1       this Act, to carry out a comprehensive assessment,  
2       in accordance with the parameters identified under  
3       the preliminary report required by paragraph (1), of  
4       the physical and mental health and other readjust-  
5       ment needs of members and former members of the  
6       Armed Forces who deployed in Operation Iraqi  
7       Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom and their  
8       families as a result of such deployment, including, at  
9       a minimum—

10               (A) an assessment of the psychological, so-  
11               cial, and economic impacts of such deployment  
12               on such members and former members and  
13               their families;

14               (B) an assessment of the particular im-  
15               pacts of multiple deployments in Operation  
16               Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom  
17               on such members and former members and  
18               their families;

19               (C) an assessment of the full scope of the  
20               neurological, psychiatric, and psychological ef-  
21               fects of Traumatic Brain Injury on members  
22               and former members of the Armed Forces, in-  
23               cluding the effects of such effects on the family  
24               members of such members and former mem-  
25               bers, and an assessment of the efficacy of cur-

1           rent treatment approaches for Traumatic Brain  
2           Injury in the United States and the efficacy of  
3           screenings and treatment approaches for Trau-  
4           matic Brain Injury within the Department of  
5           Defense and the Department of Veterans Af-  
6           fairs;

7           (D) an assessment of the effects of  
8           undiagnosed injuries such as Post-Traumatic  
9           Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain  
10          Injury, and an estimate of the long-term costs  
11          associated with such injuries;

12          (E) an assessment of the particular needs  
13          and concerns of female members of the Armed  
14          Forces and female veterans;

15          (F) an assessment of the particular needs  
16          and concerns of minority members of the  
17          Armed Forces and minority veterans;

18          (G) an assessment of the particular edu-  
19          cational and vocational needs of such members  
20          and former members and their families;

21          (H) the development, based on such as-  
22          sessments, of recommendations for programs,  
23          treatments, or policy remedies targeted at pre-  
24          venting, minimizing or addressing the impacts,  
25          gaps and needs identified; and

1 (I) the development, based on such assess-  
2 ments, of recommendations for additional re-  
3 search on such needs.

4 (d) POPULATIONS TO BE STUDIED.—The study re-  
5 quired under subsection (b) shall consider the readjust-  
6 ment needs of each population of individuals as follows:

7 (1) Members of the regular components of the  
8 Armed Forces who are returning, or have returned,  
9 to the United States from deployment in Operation  
10 Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom.

11 (2) Members of the National Guard and Re-  
12 serve who are returning, or have returned, to the  
13 United States from deployment in Operation Iraqi  
14 Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom.

15 (3) Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom or  
16 Operation Enduring Freedom.

17 (4) Family members of the members and vet-  
18 erans described in paragraphs (1) through (3).

19 (e) ACCESS TO INFORMATION.—The National Acad-  
20 emy of Sciences shall have access to such personnel, infor-  
21 mation, records, and systems of the Department of De-  
22 fense and the Department of Veterans Affairs as the Na-  
23 tional Academy of Sciences requires in order to carry out  
24 the study required under subsection (b).

1       (f) PRIVACY OF INFORMATION.—The National Acad-  
2   emy of Sciences shall maintain any personally identifiable  
3   information accessed by the Academy in carrying out the  
4   study required under subsection (b) in accordance with all  
5   applicable laws, protections, and best practices regarding  
6   the privacy of such information, and may not permit ac-  
7   cess to such information by any persons or entities not  
8   engaged in work under the study.

9       (g) REPORTS.—

10           (1) REPORTS BY NATIONAL ACADEMY OF  
11   SCIENCES.—Upon the completion of each phase of  
12   the study required under subsection (b), the Na-  
13   tional Academy of Sciences shall submit to the Sec-  
14   retary of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Af-  
15   fairs a report on such phase of the study.

16           (2) REPORTS BY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE.—  
17   The Secretary of Defense shall submit to Congress  
18   a comprehensive report on each phase of the study  
19   required under subsection (b) not later than 30 days  
20   after the date of the completion of such phase of the  
21   study. Each report shall set forth the report of the  
22   National Academy of Sciences on the phase of the  
23   study concerned under paragraph (1) and include  
24   such other information as the Secretary considers  
25   appropriate.



1           (3) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF REPORTS.—The  
2       Secretary of Defense shall make available to the  
3       public each report submitted to Congress under  
4       paragraph (2), including by posting an electronic  
5       copy of such report on the Internet website of the  
6       Department of Defense that is available to the pub-  
7       lic.

8       (h) DoD AND VA RESPONSE TO NAS REPORTS.—

9           (1) PRELIMINARY RESPONSE.—Not later than  
10      45 days after the receipt of a report under sub-  
11      section (g)(1) on each phase of the study required  
12      under subsection (b), the Secretary of Defense and  
13      the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall jointly de-  
14      velop a preliminary joint Department of Defense-De-  
15      partment of Veterans Affairs plan to address the  
16      findings and recommendations of the National Acad-  
17      emy of Sciences contained in such report. The pre-  
18      liminary plan shall provide preliminary proposals on  
19      the matters set forth in paragraph (3).

20           (2) FINAL RESPONSE.—Not later than 90 days  
21      after the receipt of a report under subsection (g)(1)  
22      on each phase of the study required under sub-  
23      section (b), the Secretary of Defense and the Sec-  
24      retary of Veterans Affairs shall jointly develop a  
25      final joint Department of Defense-Department of

1 Veterans Affairs plan to address the findings and  
2 recommendations of the National Academy of  
3 Sciences contained in such report. The final plan  
4 shall provide final proposals on the matters set forth  
5 in paragraph (3).

6 (3) COVERED MATTERS.—The matters set forth  
7 in this paragraph with respect to a phase of the  
8 study required under subsection (b) are as follows:

9 (A) Modifications of policy or practice  
10 within the Department of Defense and the De-  
11 partment of Veterans Affairs that are necessary  
12 to address gaps in care or services as identified  
13 by the National Academy of Sciences under  
14 such phase of the study.

15 (B) Modifications of policy or practice  
16 within the Department of Defense and the De-  
17 partment of Veterans Affairs that are necessary  
18 to address recommendations made by the Na-  
19 tional Academy of Sciences under such phase of  
20 the study.

21 (C) An estimate of the costs of imple-  
22 menting the modifications set forth under sub-  
23 paragraphs (A) and (B), set forth by fiscal year  
24 for at least the first five fiscal years beginning  
25 after the date of the plan concerned.

1           (4) REPORTS ON RESPONSES.—The Secretary  
2 of Defense and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
3 shall jointly submit to Congress a report setting  
4 forth each joint plan developed under paragraphs (1)  
5 and (2).

6           (5) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY OF RESPONSES.—  
7 The Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Vet-  
8 erans Affairs shall each make available to the public  
9 each report submitted to Congress under paragraph  
10 (4), including by posting an electronic copy of such  
11 report on the Internet website of the Department of  
12 Defense or the Department of Veterans Affairs, as  
13 applicable, that is available to the public.

14          (6) GAO AUDIT.—Not later than 45 days after  
15 the submittal to Congress of the report under para-  
16 graph (4) on the final joint Department of Defense-  
17 Department of Veterans Affairs plan under para-  
18 graph (2), the Comptroller General of the United  
19 States shall submit to Congress a report assessing  
20 the contents of such report under paragraph (4).  
21 The report of the Comptroller General under this  
22 paragraph shall include—

23               (A) an assessment of the adequacy and  
24 sufficiency of the final joint Department of De-  
25 fense-Department of Veterans Affairs plan in

1           addressing the findings and recommendations  
2           of the National Academy of Sciences as a result  
3           of the study required under subsection (b);

4                 (B) an assessment of the feasibility and  
5           advisability of the modifications of policy and  
6           practice proposed in the final joint Department  
7           of Defense-Department of Veterans Affairs  
8           plan;

9                 (C) an assessment of the sufficiency and  
10          accuracy of the cost estimates in the final joint  
11          Department of Defense-Department of Veterans  
12          Affairs plan; and

13                (D) the comments, if any, of the National  
14          Academy of Sciences on the final joint Depart-  
15          ment of Defense-Department of Veterans Af-  
16          fairs plan.

17          (i) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is  
18          hereby authorized to be appropriated to the Department  
19          of Defense such sums as may be necessary to carry out  
20          this section.

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