

110TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 1672

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a scholarship program for students seeking a degree or certificate in the areas of visual impairment and orientation and mobility.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 21, 2007

Mr. HAGEL (for himself, Mr. OBAMA, and Mr. BROWN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a scholarship program for students seeking a degree or certificate in the areas of visual impairment and orientation and mobility.

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 VA Vision Scholars  
5       Act of 2007”.

1 **SEC. 2. VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND ORIENTATION AND MO-**  
 2 **BILITY PROFESSIONALS EDUCATION ASSIST-**  
 3 **ANCE PROGRAM.**

4 (a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PROGRAM.—Part V of title  
 5 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end  
 6 the following new chapter:

7 **“CHAPTER 80—VISUAL IMPAIRMENT AND**  
 8 **ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY PROFES-**  
 9 **SIONALS EDUCATION ASSISTANCE**  
 10 **PROGRAM**

“Sec.

“8001. Establishment of scholarship program; purpose.

“8002. Application and acceptance.

“8003. Amount of assistance; duration.

“8004. Agreement.

“8005. Repayment for failure to satisfy requirements of agreement.

11 **“§ 8001. Establishment of scholarship program; pur-**  
 12 **pose**

13 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Subject to the availability of  
 14 appropriations, the Secretary shall establish and carry out  
 15 a scholarship program to provide financial assistance in  
 16 accordance with this chapter to an individual—

17 “(1) who is accepted for enrollment or currently  
 18 enrolled in a program of study leading to a degree  
 19 or certificate in visual impairment or orientation and  
 20 mobility, or a dual degree or certification in both  
 21 such areas, at an accredited (as determined by the

1 Secretary) educational institution that is in a State;  
2 and

3 “(2) who enters into an agreement with the  
4 Secretary as described in section 8004 of this title.

5 “(b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the scholarship pro-  
6 gram established under this chapter is to increase the sup-  
7 ply of qualified blind rehabilitation specialists for the De-  
8 partment and the Nation.

9 “(c) OUTREACH.—The Secretary shall publicize the  
10 scholarship program established under this chapter to edu-  
11 cational institutions throughout the United States, with  
12 an emphasis on disseminating information to such institu-  
13 tions with high numbers of Hispanic students and to His-  
14 torically Black Colleges and Universities.

15 **“§ 8002. Application and acceptance**

16 “(a) APPLICATION.—(1) To apply and participate in  
17 the scholarship program under this chapter, an individual  
18 shall submit to the Secretary an application for such par-  
19 ticipation together with an agreement described in section  
20 8004 of this title under which the participant agrees to  
21 serve a period of obligated service in the Department as  
22 provided in the agreement in return for payment of edu-  
23 cational assistance as provided in the agreement.

24 “(2) In distributing application forms and agreement  
25 forms to individuals desiring to participate in the scholar-

1 ship program, the Secretary shall include with such forms  
2 the following:

3 “(A) A fair summary of the rights and liabil-  
4 ities of an individual whose application is approved  
5 (and whose agreement is accepted) by the Secretary.

6 “(B) A full description of the terms and condi-  
7 tions that apply to participation in the scholarship  
8 program and service in the Department.

9 “(b) APPROVAL.—(1) Upon the Secretary’s approval  
10 of an individual’s participation in the scholarship program,  
11 the Secretary shall, in writing, promptly notify the indi-  
12 vidual of that acceptance.

13 “(2) An individual becomes a participant in the schol-  
14 arship program upon such approval by the Secretary.

15 **“§ 8003. Amount of assistance; duration**

16 “(a) AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE.—The amount of the  
17 financial assistance provided for an individual under this  
18 chapter shall be the amount determined by the Secretary  
19 as being necessary to pay the tuition and fees of the indi-  
20 vidual. In the case of an individual enrolled in a program  
21 of study leading to a dual degree or certification in both  
22 the areas of study described in section 8001(a)(1) of this  
23 title, the tuition and fees shall not exceed the amounts  
24 necessary for the minimum number of credit hours to  
25 achieve such dual certification or degree.

1       “(b) RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ASSISTANCE.—Fi-  
2 nancial assistance may be provided to an individual under  
3 this chapter to supplement other educational assistance to  
4 the extent that the total amount of educational assistance  
5 received by the individual during an academic year does  
6 not exceed the total tuition and fees for such academic  
7 year.

8       “(c) MAXIMUM AMOUNT OF ASSISTANCE.—(1) In no  
9 case may the total amount of assistance provided under  
10 this chapter for an academic year to an individual who  
11 is a full-time student exceed \$15,000.

12       “(2) In the case of an individual who is a part-time  
13 student, the total amount of assistance provided under  
14 this chapter shall bear the same ratio to the amount that  
15 would be paid under paragraph (1) if the participant were  
16 a full-time student in the program of study being pursued  
17 by the individual as the coursework carried by the indi-  
18 vidual to full-time coursework in that program of study.

19       “(3) In no case may the total amount of assistance  
20 provided to an individual under this chapter exceed  
21 \$45,000.

22       “(d) MAXIMUM DURATION OF ASSISTANCE.—The  
23 Secretary may provide financial assistance to an individual  
24 under this chapter for not more than six years.

1 **“§ 8004. Agreement**

2       “An agreement between the Secretary and a partici-  
3 pant in the scholarship program under this chapter shall  
4 be in writing, shall be signed by the participant, and shall  
5 include the following:

6           “(1) The Secretary’s agreement to provide the  
7 participant with financial assistance as authorized  
8 under this chapter.

9           “(2) The participant’s agreement—

10               “(A) to accept such financial assistance;

11               “(B) to maintain enrollment and attend-  
12 ance in the program of study described in sec-  
13 tion 8001(a)(1) of this chapter;

14               “(C) while enrolled in such program, to  
15 maintain an acceptable level of academic stand-  
16 ing (as determined by the educational institu-  
17 tion offering such program under regulations  
18 prescribed by the Secretary); and

19               “(D) after completion of the program, to  
20 serve as a full-time employee in the Department  
21 for a period of three years, to be served within  
22 the first six years after the participant has com-  
23 pleted such program and received a degree or  
24 certificate described in section 8001(a)(1) of  
25 this chapter.

1           “(3) Such other terms and conditions that the  
2           Secretary determines appropriate for carrying out  
3           this chapter.

4   **“§ 8005. Repayment for failure to satisfy require-**  
5                           **ments of agreement**

6           “(a) IN GENERAL.—An individual who receives edu-  
7           cational assistance under this chapter shall repay to the  
8           Secretary an amount equal to the unearned portion of  
9           such assistance if the individual fails to satisfy the require-  
10          ments of the agreement entered into under section 8004  
11          of this title, except in circumstances authorized by the  
12          Secretary.

13          “(b) AMOUNT OF REPAYMENT.—The Secretary shall  
14          establish, by regulations, procedures for determining the  
15          amount of the repayment required under this section and  
16          the circumstances under which an exception to the re-  
17          quired repayment may be granted.

18          “(c) WAIVER OR SUSPENSION OF COMPLIANCE.—  
19          The Secretary shall prescribe regulations providing for the  
20          waiver or suspension of any obligation of an individual for  
21          service or payment under this chapter (or an agreement  
22          under this chapter) whenever noncompliance by the indi-  
23          vidual is due to circumstances beyond the control of the  
24          individual or whenever the Secretary determines that the

1 waiver or suspension of compliance is in the best interest  
 2 of the United States.

3 “(d) OBLIGATION AS DEBT TO UNITED STATES.—  
 4 An obligation to repay the Secretary under this section  
 5 is, for all purposes, a debt owed the United States. A dis-  
 6 charge in bankruptcy under title 11 does not discharge  
 7 a person from such debt if the discharge order is entered  
 8 less than five years after the date of the termination of  
 9 the agreement or contract on which the debt is based.”.

10 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The tables of chap-  
 11 ters at the beginning of title 38, and of part V of title  
 12 38, are each amended by inserting after the item relating  
 13 to chapter 79 the following new item:

“80. Visual Impairment and Orientation and Mobility Professionals  
 Education Assistance Program ..... 8001.”.

14 (c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The Secretary of Veterans  
 15 Affairs shall implement chapter 80 of title 38, United  
 16 States Code, as added by subsection (a), not later than  
 17 six months after the date of the enactment of this Act.

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