

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2698

To improve and enhance the mental health care benefits available to veterans, to enhance counseling and other benefits available to survivors of veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 4, 2009

Ms. GIFFORDS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To improve and enhance the mental health care benefits available to veterans, to enhance counseling and other benefits available to survivors of veterans, 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 “Veterans and Survivors
5 Behavioral Health Awareness Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR EDUCATION AND**
2 **TRAINING OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE**
3 **SPECIALISTS FOR VET CENTERS.**

4 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
5 erans Affairs, acting through the Under Secretary for
6 Health of the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall carry
7 out a program to provide scholarships to individuals pur-
8 suing education or training in behavioral health care spe-
9 cialties that are critical to the operations of Vet Centers
10 in order to recruit and retain individuals with such special-
11 ties for service as behavioral health care specialists in Vet
12 Centers.

13 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—An individual shall be eligible for
14 a scholarship under the program under this section if the
15 individual—

16 (1) is pursuing education or training leading to
17 licensure or other certified proficiency in such behav-
18 ioral health care specialties critical to the operations
19 of Vet Centers as the Secretary shall designate for
20 purposes of the program; and

21 (2) otherwise meets such other criteria or re-
22 quirements as the Secretary shall establish for pur-
23 poses of the program.

24 (c) AMOUNT.—The amount of any scholarship pro-
25 vided under the program under this section shall be deter-
26 mined by the Secretary.

1 (d) AGREEMENT TO SERVE AS BEHAVIORAL
2 HEALTH CARE SPECIALIST IN VET CENTERS.—As a con-
3 dition of receipt of a scholarship under the program under
4 this section, an individual receiving a scholarship shall
5 enter into an agreement with the Secretary to serve as
6 an employee of a Vet Center in the behavioral health care
7 specialty of the individual for such period as the Secretary
8 shall specify in the agreement.

9 (e) REPAYMENT.—Each agreement under subsection
10 (c) shall contain such provisions as the Under Secretary
11 shall establish for purposes of the program under this sec-
12 tion relating to repayment of the amount of a scholarship
13 provided under this section in the event the individual en-
14 tering into such agreement does not fulfill the service re-
15 quirements in such agreement. Such provisions shall
16 apply, to the maximum extent practicable, uniformly to
17 all recipients of scholarships provided under this section.

18 (f) FUNDING.—(1) Amounts for scholarships under
19 the program under this section shall be derived from
20 amounts available to the Secretary for readjustment bene-
21 fits.

22 (2) The total amount available for scholarships under
23 the program under this section in any fiscal year may not
24 exceed \$2,000,000.

1 (g) VET CENTERS DEFINED.—In this section, the
 2 term “Vet Centers” means the centers for readjustment
 3 counseling and related mental health services for veterans
 4 under section 1712A of title 38, United States Code.

5 **SEC. 3. RESTORATION OF AUTHORITY OF VETS CENTERS**
 6 **TO PROVIDE REFERRAL AND OTHER ASSIST-**
 7 **ANCE UPON REQUEST TO FORMER MEMBERS**
 8 **OF THE ARMED FORCES NOT AUTHORIZED**
 9 **COUNSELING.**

10 Section 1712A of title 38, United States Code, is
 11 amended by inserting after subsection (b) the following
 12 new subsection (c):

13 “(c) Upon receipt of a request for counseling under
 14 this section from any individual who has been discharged
 15 or released from active military, naval, or air service but
 16 who is not otherwise eligible for such counseling, the Sec-
 17 retary shall—

18 “(1) provide referral services to assist such in-
 19 dividual, to the maximum extent practicable, in ob-
 20 taining mental health care and services from sources
 21 outside the Department; and

22 “(2) if pertinent, advise such individual of such
 23 individual’s rights to apply to the appropriate mili-
 24 tary, naval, or air service, and to the Department,

1 for review of such individual's discharge or release
2 from such service.”.

3 **SEC. 4. GRANTS FOR NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE**
4 **PROVISION OF EMOTIONAL SUPPORT SERV-**
5 **ICES TO SURVIVORS OF MEMBERS OF THE**
6 **ARMED FORCES AND VETERANS.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
8 shall carry out a program to award grants to nonprofit
9 organizations that provide emotional support services for
10 survivors of deceased members of the Armed Forces (in-
11 cluding members of the National Guard and Reserve) and
12 deceased veterans through peers of such survivors.

13 (b) AWARD OF GRANTS.—

14 (1) ELIGIBILITY.—To be eligible for a grant
15 under the program under this section, a nonprofit
16 organization shall meet such criteria as the Sec-
17 retary shall establish for purposes of the program.

18 (2) APPLICATION.—A nonprofit organization
19 seeking a grant under the program shall submit to
20 the Secretary an application for the grant in such
21 form and manner as the Secretary shall specify for
22 purposes of the program.

23 (c) GRANTS.—

24 (1) AMOUNT.—The amount of each grant
25 awarded a nonprofit organization under the program

1 under this section shall be such amount as the Sec-
2 retary determines appropriate for purposes of the
3 program.

4 (2) DURATION.—The duration of each grant
5 awarded a nonprofit organization shall be such pe-
6 riod as the Secretary determines appropriate for
7 purposes of the program.

8 (d) USE OF GRANT FUNDS.—Each nonprofit organi-
9 zation awarded a grant under the program under this sec-
10 tion shall utilize amounts under the grant to provide such
11 emotional support services for survivors of deceased mem-
12 bers of the Armed Forces (including members of the Na-
13 tional Guard and Reserve) and deceased veterans through
14 peers of such survivors as the Secretary shall specify in
15 the grant.

16 (e) FUNDING.—Amounts for grants under the pro-
17 gram under this section shall be derived from amounts au-
18 thorized to be appropriated for the Veterans Health Ad-
19 ministration of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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