

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1134

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a grant program and pilot program designed to improve the delivery of health care to veterans residing in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 13, 2013

Mr. GALLEGO introduced the following bill; which was referred to the
Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a grant program and pilot program designed to improve the delivery of health care to veterans residing 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. FINDINGS.**

4 Congress makes the following findings:

5 (1) The estimated veteran population of the
6 Nation is 22,328,000.

7 (2) Nearly 30 percent of veterans live in rural
8 areas, with younger veterans who served in support

1 of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring
2 Freedom more likely than other veterans to live in
3 rural areas.

4 (3) Veterans living in rural areas are reported
5 to be in poorer health than veterans living in urban
6 areas.

7 (4) Veterans living in rural areas often need to
8 travel extremely long distances to receive medical
9 care and the other services to which they are enti-
10 tled.

11 (5) The medical facilities of the Department of
12 Veterans Affairs include 821 community-based out-
13 patient clinics, 300 veterans centers, and 152 hos-
14 pitals.

15 (6) Rural veterans represent 41 percent of the
16 total number of veterans enrolled in the Department
17 of Veterans Affairs patient enrollment system under
18 section 1705 of title 38, United States Code.

19 (7) A higher percentage of veterans residing in
20 rural areas reported having at least one disability
21 compared with veterans residing in urban areas.

22 (8) Each year more than 150,000 members of
23 the Armed Forces are discharged or separated from
24 service in the Armed Forces and transition to vet-
25 eran status.

1 (9) Navigating the transition from the health
2 care system of Department of Defense to the health
3 care system of the Department of Veterans Affairs
4 involves the coordination of data and information be-
5 tween Department of Defense and the Department
6 of Veterans Affairs.

7 (10) It is important to develop electronic health
8 records that can be accessed by both the Depart-
9 ment of Defense and the Department of Veterans
10 Affairs whether a patient is a member of the Armed
11 Forces or a veteran to ensure the greater availability
12 of health care information for members of the
13 Armed Forces and veterans.

14 **SEC. 2. TRANSPORTATION GRANTS FOR RURAL VETERANS**
15 **SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS.**

16 (a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
18 Affairs shall establish a grant program to provide in-
19 novative transportation options to veterans in highly
20 rural areas.

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

1 (A) assist veterans in highly rural areas to
2 travel to Department of Veterans Affairs med-
3 ical centers; and

4 (B) otherwise assist in providing medical
5 care to veterans in highly rural areas.

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

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

12 (5) RECOVERY OF UNUSED GRANT FUNDS.—If
13 a recipient of a grant does not use the full amount
14 of funds received under this section by not later
15 than September 30 of the fiscal year in which such
16 grant was awarded, the United States shall be enti-
17 tled to recover from such recipient the total of all
18 unused grant amounts made under this section to
19 such recipient.

20 (b) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe
21 regulations for—

22 (1) evaluating grant applications under this sec-
23 tion; and

24 (2) otherwise administering the program estab-
25 lished by this section.

1 (c) REPORTS.—Not later than February 1 of each
2 year, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a report con-
3 taining information related to each grant awarded under
4 this section during the preceding year, including—

5 (1) the name of the grant recipient; and

6 (2) the amount of the grant.

7 (d) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION DEFINI-
8 TION.—In this section, the term “veterans service organi-
9 zation” means any organization recognized by the Sec-
10 retary of Veterans Affairs for the representation of vet-
11 erans under section 5902 of title 38, United States Code.

12 **SEC. 3. OUTREACH REQUIREMENT.**

13 (a) OUTREACH REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
14 erans Affairs shall conduct outreach, including under
15 chapter 63 of title 38, United States Code, to educate vet-
16 erans and their family members about the availability of
17 transportation to assist veterans living in rural areas in
18 traveling to Department of Veterans Affairs medical facili-
19 ties, including transportation available pursuant to a
20 grant made under section 2.

21 (b) OUTREACH DEFINED.—In this section, the term
22 “outreach” shall have the meaning given such term in sec-
23 tion 6301(b)(1) of title 38, United States Code.

1 **SEC. 4. PILOT PROGRAM FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF**
2 **ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD SYSTEMS OR**
3 **CAPABILITIES AT DEPARTMENT OF VET-**
4 **ERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL FACILITIES LO-**
5 **CATED IN RURAL AREAS.**

6 (a) PILOT PROGRAM.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
7 fairs, in cooperation with the Secretary of Defense, shall
8 carry out a pilot program under section 1635(f) of the
9 National Defense Authorization Act of Fiscal Year 2008
10 (Public Law 110–181; 122 Stat. 462; 10 U.S.C. 1071
11 note) at Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities
12 located in rural areas and selected by the Secretary. Such
13 pilot program shall be designed to—

14 (1) implement at such medical facilities elec-
15 tronic health record systems or capabilities that
16 allow for full interoperability of personal health care
17 information between the Department of Defense and
18 the Department of Veterans Affairs;

19 (2) ensure that veterans served by such medical
20 facilities are afforded the technological advances to
21 improve the quality of health care they receive;

22 (3) provide physicians and other personnel at
23 such medical facilities with access to the complete
24 personal health care information of members of the
25 Armed Forces who are discharged or released from
26 service in the Armed Forces; and

1 (4) increase the accessibility, efficiency, and use
2 of electronic health records at such facilities to meet
3 improved health care needs.

4 (b) SELECTION OF MEDICAL FACILITIES.—The Sec-
5 retary of Veterans Affairs, in cooperation with the Sec-
6 retary of Defense, shall select Department of Veterans Af-
7 fairs medical facilities at which to carry out the pilot pro-
8 gram under this section. Such facilities shall be located
9 in rural areas where the population rate of veterans ex-
10 ceeds six percent.

11 (c) REPORTS.—Not later than April 1 of each year,
12 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to Congress
13 a report on the pilot program under this section. Each
14 such report shall include—

15 (1) an evaluation of best practices relating to
16 furnishing health care to veterans residing in rural
17 areas;

18 (2) an evaluation of the education and training
19 provided to physicians and other personnel at med-
20 ical facilities participating in the pilot program; and

21 (3) an evaluation of the health care provided to
22 veterans residing in rural areas.

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