

113TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 5589

To direct the Secretary of Education to establish a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, and improving veteran student centers.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

Ms. FRANKEL of Florida (for herself, Mr. BILIRAKIS, and Mr. TAKANO) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Education to establish a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, and improving veteran student centers.

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 “Veteran Education
5 Empowerment Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Over 1,000,000 veterans attended institu-
2 tions of higher education in 2012.

3 (2) Veterans face unique hardships in
4 transitioning from the battlefield to the classroom
5 and eventually to the workforce.

6 (3) The National Endowment for the Human-
7 ities' Warrior-Scholar Project found that "veterans
8 transitioning to college likely have not used academic
9 skills since high school and have difficulty adjusting
10 to a fundamentally different social and cultural envi-
11 ronment, [leading] to veterans dropping out of col-
12 lege before earning their degree".

13 (4) The National Education Association found
14 that veteran students can feel lonely and vulnerable
15 on campus and that "connecting student veterans
16 can effectively ease this isolation" by bringing to-
17 gether new veteran students with those who have al-
18 ready successfully navigated the first few semesters
19 of college.

20 (5) The unemployment rate for post—9/11 vet-
21 erans far outpaces both the overall non-veteran un-
22 employment rate and the unemployment rate for
23 non-veterans entering the workforce for the first
24 time.

1 (6) According to Mission United—a United
2 Way program that helps veterans re-acclimate to ci-
3 vilian life—it is often “essential” for veteran stu-
4 dents to be mentored by “another veteran who un-
5 derstands their mindset and experience”.

6 (7) Veteran student centers are recognized as
7 an institutional best practice by the Student Vet-
8 erans of America.

9 (8) The American Council on Education, which
10 represents more than 1,700 institutions of higher
11 education across the country, has called having a
12 dedicated space for veterans on campus “a prom-
13 ising way for colleges and universities to better serve
14 veterans on campus” and a “critical” component of
15 many colleges’ efforts to serve their veteran stu-
16 dents.

17 (9) Budget constraints often make it difficult or
18 impossible for institutions of higher education to
19 dedicate space to veteran offices, lounges, or student
20 centers.

21 (10) The 110th Congress authorized the fund-
22 ing of veteran student centers through the Centers
23 of Excellence for Veteran Student Success under
24 part T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of
25 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t).

1 (11) According to the Department of Edu-
2 cation, federally funded veteran student centers and
3 staff have generated improved recruitment, reten-
4 tion, and graduation rates, have helped veteran stu-
5 dents feel better connected across campus, and have
6 directly contributed to student veterans' successful
7 academic outcomes.

8 **SEC. 3. GRANT PROGRAM TO ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND**
9 **IMPROVE VETERAN STUDENT CENTERS.**

10 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—From the amounts appro-
11 priated to carry out this Act, the Secretary of Education
12 shall establish a program to award grants to institutions
13 of higher education to assist in the establishment, mainte-
14 nance, and improvement of veteran student centers.

15 (b) ELIGIBILITY.—

16 (1) APPLICATION.—An institution of higher
17 education seeking a grant under subsection (a) shall
18 submit to the Secretary an application at such time,
19 in such manner, and containing such information as
20 the Secretary may require.

21 (2) CRITERIA.—The Secretary may award a
22 grant under subsection (a) to an institution of high-
23 er education if the Secretary determines that the in-
24 stitution of higher education meets the following cri-
25 teria:

1 (A) The institution has a population of not
2 less than 15,000 students, of which not less
3 than one percent are veterans or members of
4 the Armed Forces.

5 (B) The institution is located in a region
6 or community that has a significant population
7 of veterans.

8 (C) The institution carries out programs or
9 activities that assist veterans in the local com-
10 munity.

11 (D) The institution presents a sustain-
12 ability plan to demonstrate that its veteran stu-
13 dent center will be maintained and will continue
14 to operate after the term of the grant has
15 ended.

16 (c) USE OF FUNDS.—An institution of higher edu-
17 cation that is awarded a grant under subsection (a) shall
18 use such grant to establish, maintain, or improve a veteran
19 student center.

20 (d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

21 (1) DURATION.—Each grant awarded under
22 subsection (a) shall be for a 4-year period.

23 (2) TOTAL AMOUNT OF GRANT AND SCHED-
24 ULE.—Each grant awarded under subsection (a)
25 may not exceed a total of \$500,000. Subject to sub-

1 section (e), the Secretary shall disburse to the insti-
2 tution of higher education the amounts awarded
3 under the grant in such amounts and at such times
4 during the grant period as the Secretary determines
5 appropriate.

6 (e) EVALUATION.—The Secretary shall annually
7 evaluate each institution of higher education that is
8 awarded a grant under subsection (a) to determine wheth-
9 er the institution uses the grant in accordance with this
10 section. If the Secretary determines that the institution
11 of higher education is not using the grant in accordance
12 with this section, the Secretary may delay future disburse-
13 ments of amounts described in subsection (d)(2) until the
14 Secretary determines that the institution of higher edu-
15 cation has corrected any deficiencies and will use such
16 amounts in accordance with this section.

17 (f) REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the date
18 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit
19 to Congress a report on the grant program established
20 under subsection (a), including—

21 (1) the number of grants awarded;

22 (2) the institutions of higher education that
23 have received grants;

24 (3) with respect to each such institution of
25 higher education—

1 (A) the amounts awarded; and

2 (B) how such institution used such
3 amounts; and

4 (4) a determination by the Secretary with re-
5 spect to whether the grant program should be ex-
6 tended or expanded.

7 (g) TERMINATION.—The authority of the Secretary
8 to carry out the grant program established under sub-
9 section (a) shall terminate on the date that is 4 years after
10 the date on which the grant program is established.

11 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

12 (1) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The
13 term “institution of higher education” has the
14 meaning given the term in section 101 of the Higher
15 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

16 (2) VETERAN STUDENT CENTER.—The term
17 “veteran student center” means a dedicated space
18 on a campus of an institution of higher education
19 that provides students who are veterans or members
20 of the Armed Forces with the following:

21 (A) A lounge or meeting space for such
22 students and veterans in the community.

23 (B) A centralized office for veteran serv-
24 ices that—

1 (i) is staffed by trained employees and
2 volunteers; and

3 (ii) provides such students with assist-
4 ance relating to—

5 (I) transitioning from the mili-
6 tary to student life;

7 (II) transitioning from the mili-
8 tary to the civilian workforce;

9 (III) networking with other such
10 students;

11 (IV) understanding and obtaining
12 benefits provided by the Federal Gov-
13 ernment or a State for which such
14 students may be eligible; and

15 (V) understanding how to suc-
16 ceed in the institution of higher edu-
17 cation, including by understanding
18 how to transfer educational credits.

○