

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1155

To provide for advance appropriations for certain information technology accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to include mental health professionals in training programs of the Department, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 12, 2013

Mr. TESTER introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To provide for advance appropriations for certain information technology accounts of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to include mental health professionals in training programs of the Department, 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 “Rural Veterans Mental
5 Health Care Improvement Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. ADVANCE APPROPRIATIONS FOR ACCOUNTS FOR**
2 **HEALTH-RELATED INFORMATION TECH-**
3 **NOLOGY FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF VET-**
4 **ERANS AFFAIRS.**

5 (a) ADVANCE APPROPRIATIONS FOR INFORMATION
6 TECHNOLOGY ACCOUNTS.—Section 117(c) of title 38,
7 United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the
8 following:

9 “(4) Accounts, including subaccounts of the Ac-
10 counts referred to in paragraphs (1) through (3),
11 providing funds for information technology.”.

12 (b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by
13 subsection (a) shall take effect on October 1, 2014, and
14 shall apply with respect to fiscal years beginning on or
15 after that date.

16 **SEC. 3. INCLUSION OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**
17 **IN THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAM**
18 **FOR HEALTH PERSONNEL OF THE DEPART-**
19 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

20 (a) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the education and
21 training program required under section 7302(a)(1) of
22 title 38, United States Code, the Secretary of Veterans
23 Affairs shall include education and training of marriage
24 and family therapists and licensed professional mental
25 health counselors.

1 (b) FUNDING.—The Secretary shall apportion fund-
 2 ing for the education and training program equally among
 3 the professions included in the program.

4 **SEC. 4. PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR**
 5 **FAMILIES OF CERTAIN VETERANS AT FACILI-**
 6 **TIES OF THE DEPARTMENT.**

7 (a) PROVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES AT
 8 DEPARTMENT FACILITIES.—Subsection (e) of section 304
 9 of the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services
 10 Act of 2010 (38 U.S.C. 1712A note; Public Law 111–
 11 163) is amended—

12 (1) by striking “PEER OUTREACH AND PEER
 13 SUPPORT SERVICES” and inserting “SERVICES”;
 14 and

15 (2) by striking “The Secretary shall carry out
 16 the services” and inserting “The Secretary shall
 17 carry out—

18 “(1) the services”;

19 (3) by striking the period at the end and insert-
 20 ing “; and”; and

21 (4) by adding at the end the following new
 22 paragraph:

23 “(2) the mental health services required by sub-
 24 section (a)(2) at or through Department medical
 25 centers.”.

1 (b) DEFINITION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.—

2 Such section is further amended by striking subsection (f)

3 and inserting the following:

4 “(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

5 “(1) MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.—The term
6 ‘mental health services’ includes outpatient mental
7 healthcare referred to in section 17.38(a)(1)(i) of
8 title 38, Code of Federal Regulations (as in effect on
9 the day before the date of enactment of this Act).

10 “(2) VET CENTER.—The term ‘vet center’
11 means a center for readjustment counseling and re-
12 lated mental health services for veterans under sec-
13 tion 1712A of title 38, United States Code.”.

14 **SEC. 5. REPORT ON PROVISION OF TELEMEDICINE SERV-**
15 **ICES.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 120 days after the
17 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Vet-
18 erans Affairs shall submit to the Committee on Veterans’
19 Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’ Af-
20 fairs of the House of Representatives a report on the fol-
21 lowing:

22 (1) Issues that may be impeding the provision
23 by the Department of Veterans Affairs of telemedi-
24 cine services for veterans, including the following:

25 (A) Statutory or regulatory restrictions.

1 (B) Licensure or credentialing issues for
2 any provider practicing telemedicine with vet-
3 erans who live in a different State than the pro-
4 vider.

5 (C) Limited broadband access in rural
6 areas.

7 (D) Limited information technology re-
8 sources or capabilities.

9 (E) Long distances veterans must travel to
10 access a facility or clinic with telemedicine ca-
11 pabilities.

12 (F) Insufficient liability protection for pro-
13 viders.

14 (G) Reimbursement issues faced by pro-
15 viders.

16 (H) Travel limitations for providers that
17 are unaffiliated with the Department and are
18 participating or seeking to participate in a tele-
19 medicine program of the Department.

20 (2) Actions taken to address the issues identi-
21 fied in paragraph (1).

22 (3) An update on efforts by the Department to
23 carry out the initiative of teleconsultation for the
24 provision of remote mental health and traumatic

1 brain injury assessments required by section 1709A
2 of title 38, United States Code.

3 (4) An update on efforts by the Department to
4 offer training opportunities in telemedicine to med-
5 ical residents, as required by section 108(b) of the
6 Janey Ensminger Act (Public Law 112–154; 38
7 U.S.C. 7406 note).

8 (5) An update on efforts by the Department to,
9 in partnership with primary care providers, install
10 video cameras and instruments to monitor weight,
11 blood pressure, and other vital statistics in the
12 homes of patients.

13 (b) **TELEMEDICINE DEFINED.**—In this section, the
14 term “telemedicine” means the use by a health care pro-
15 vider of telecommunications to assist in the diagnosis or
16 treatment of a patient’s medical condition.

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