

113TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 927

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a demonstration project to assess the feasibility and advisability of using State and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations to increase awareness of benefits and services for veterans and to improve coordination of outreach activities relating to such benefits and services, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 9, 2013

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

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a demonstration project to assess the feasibility and advisability of using State and local government agencies and nonprofit organizations to increase awareness of benefits and services for veterans and to improve coordination of outreach activities relating to such benefits and services, 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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Veterans’ Outreach
3 Act of 2013”.

4 **SEC. 2. DEMONSTRATION PROJECT TO INCREASE COORDI-
5 NATION OF OUTREACH EFFORTS BETWEEN
6 THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
7 AND FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES
8 AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS.**

9 (a) **DEMONSTRATION PROJECT REQUIRED.**—The
10 Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a demonstra-
11 tion project to assess the feasibility and advisability of
12 using State and local government agencies and nonprofit
13 organizations—

14 (1) to increase awareness of veterans regarding
15 benefits and services for veterans; and

16 (2) to improve coordination of outreach activi-
17 ties regarding such benefits and services between the
18 Secretary and Federal, State, and local government
19 and nonprofit providers of health care and benefit
20 services for veterans.

21 (b) **DURATION.**—

22 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—The demonstration project
23 shall be carried out during the two-year period be-
24 ginning on the date that is 180 days after the date
25 of the enactment of this Act.

1 (2) AUTHORITY FOR EXTENSION.—The Sec-
2 retary may extend the duration of the demonstration
3 project for an additional two years.

4 (c) GRANTS.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry
6 out the demonstration project through the award of
7 grants to State and local government agencies and
8 nonprofit organizations to carry out projects that—

9 (A) increase the awareness of veterans re-
10 garding benefits and services for veterans; and

11 (B) improve coordination of outreach ac-
12 tivities regarding such benefits and services be-
13 tween the Secretary and Federal, State, and
14 local government and nonprofit providers of
15 health care and benefit services for veterans.

16 (2) APPLICATION.—

17 (A) IN GENERAL.—A State or local gov-
18 ernment agency or nonprofit organization seek-
19 ing a grant under the demonstration project
20 shall submit to the Secretary an application
21 therefor in such form and in such manner as
22 the Secretary considers appropriate.

23 (B) ELEMENTS.—Each application sub-
24 mitted under subparagraph (A) shall include
25 the following:

1 (i) A description of the consultations,
2 if any, with the Department of Veterans
3 Affairs in the development of any proposal
4 under the application.

5 (ii) A description of the project for
6 which the applicant is seeking a grant
7 under the demonstration project, including
8 a plan to coordinate under the demonstra-
9 tion project, to the greatest extent possible,
10 the outreach activities of Federal, State,
11 and local government agencies that provide
12 health care, benefits, and services for vet-
13 erans and nonprofit organizations that pro-
14 vide such care, benefits, and services to en-
15 hance the awareness and availability of
16 such care, benefits, and services.

17 (iii) An agreement to report to the
18 Secretary standardized data and other per-
19 formance measures necessary for the Sec-
20 retary to evaluate the demonstration
21 project and to facilitate evaluation of indi-
22 vidual projects for which grants are award-
23 ed under the demonstration project.

24 (iv) Such other information as the
25 Secretary may require.

1 (3) CONSIDERATIONS.—In awarding grants
2 under the demonstration project to carry out
3 projects, the Secretary shall consider where the
4 projects will be carried out and which populations
5 are targeted. In particular, the Secretary shall con-
6 sider the advisability of awarding grants for
7 projects—

8 (A) carried out in areas with populations
9 that have a high proportion of veteran represen-
10 tation;

11 (B) carried out in a variety of geographic
12 areas, including urban, rural, and highly rural
13 areas; and

14 (C) that target a variety of veteran popu-
15 lations, including racial and ethnic minorities,
16 low-income populations, and older populations.

17 (4) USE OF FUNDS.—The Secretary shall estab-
18 lish appropriate uses of grant amounts received
19 under the demonstration project.

20 (5) LIMITATION.—In a fiscal year, not more
21 than 20 percent of all grant amounts awarded in
22 that fiscal year may be awarded to a single State en-
23 tity.

24 (d) STATE MATCHING REQUIREMENT.—The Sec-
25 retary may not make a grant to a State under subsection

1 (c) unless that State agrees that, with respect to the costs
2 to be incurred by the State in carrying out the program
3 or activities for which the grant was awarded, the State
4 will make available (directly or through donations from
5 public or private entities) non-Federal contributions in an
6 amount equal to 50 percent of Federal funds provided
7 under the grant.

8 (e) ANNUAL REPORT.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 120 days
10 after the completion of the first calendar year begin-
11 ning after the date of the commencement of the
12 demonstration project, and not less frequently than
13 once every year thereafter for the duration of the
14 project, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a re-
15 port evaluating the demonstration project and the
16 projects supported by grants awarded under the
17 demonstration project.

18 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-
19 graph (1) shall include the following:

20 (A) The findings and conclusions of the
21 Secretary with respect to the demonstration
22 project.

23 (B) An assessment of the benefit to vet-
24 erans of the demonstration project.

1 (C) The recommendations of the Secretary
2 as to the feasibility and advisability of con-
3 tinuing or expanding the demonstration project.

4 **SEC. 3. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN SECRETARY**
5 **OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND STATES ON OUT-**
6 **REACH ACTIVITIES.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United
8 States Code, is amended by inserting after section 6306
9 the following new section:

10 **“§ 6306A. Cooperative agreements with States**

11 “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter into co-
12 operative agreements and arrangements with various
13 agencies and departments of States to carry out this chap-
14 ter and to otherwise carry out, coordinate, improve, or en-
15 hance outreach activities of the Department and the
16 States.

17 “(b) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not less frequently than
18 once each year, the Secretary shall submit to Congress a
19 report that describes the agreements and arrangements
20 entered into by the Secretary under subsection (a) during
21 the most recent one-year period.”.

22 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
23 at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended
24 by inserting after the item relating to section 6306 the
25 following new item:

“6306A. Cooperative agreements with States.”.

1 **SEC. 4. BUDGET TRANSPARENCY FOR OUTREACH ACTIVI-**
2 **TIES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
3 **FAIRS.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United
5 States Code, is amended by inserting after section 6308
6 the following new section:

7 **“§ 6309. Budget transparency**

8 “(a) BUDGET REQUIREMENTS.—In the budget jus-
9 tification materials submitted to Congress in support of
10 the Department budget for a fiscal year (as submitted
11 with the budget of the President under section 1105(a)
12 of title 31), the Secretary shall include a separate state-
13 ment of the amount requested for such fiscal year for ac-
14 tivities of the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Af-
15 fairs as follows:

16 “(1) For outreach activities of the Department
17 in aggregate.

18 “(2) For outreach activities of each element of
19 the Department specified in subsection (b)(1).

20 “(b) PROCEDURES FOR EFFECTIVE COORDINATION
21 AND COLLABORATION.—(1) Not later than 180 days after
22 the date of the enactment of the Veterans’ Outreach Act
23 of 2013, the Secretary shall establish and maintain proce-
24 dures for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Af-
25 fairs to ensure the effective coordination and collaboration

1 of outreach activities of the Department between and
2 among the following:

3 “(A) The Office of the Secretary.

4 “(B) The Veterans Health Administration.

5 “(C) The Veterans Benefits Administration.

6 “(D) The National Cemetery Administration.

7 “(2) The Secretary shall—

8 “(A) beginning after the date on which the Sec-
9 retary establishes procedures under paragraph (1),
10 not less frequently than once every two years con-
11 duct a review of the procedures established and
12 maintained under paragraph (1) to ensure that such
13 procedures meet the requirements such paragraph;

14 “(B) make such modifications to such proce-
15 dures as the Secretary considers appropriate based
16 upon reviews conducted under subparagraph (A) in
17 order to better meet such requirements; and

18 “(C) not later than 45 days after completing a
19 review under subparagraph (A), submit to Congress
20 a report on such review.”.

21 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
22 at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended
23 by inserting after the item relating to section 6308 the
24 following new item:

“6309. Budget transparency.”.

1 **SEC. 5. ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**
2 **OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

3 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 180 days after
4 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of
5 Veterans Affairs shall establish an advisory committee on
6 outreach activities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

7 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—The advisory committee shall be
8 composed of individuals selected by the Secretary from
9 among the following:

10 (1) To the maximum extent practicable, individ-
11 uals who are eminent in their respective fields of
12 public relations.

13 (2) Representatives of organizations with offices
14 that focus on communications and distribute mes-
15 sages through major media news outlets and social
16 media.

17 (3) To the maximum extent practicable, individ-
18 uals with experience communicating financial results
19 and business strategy for purposes of shaping a con-
20 fident brand image.

21 (4) To the maximum extent practicable, individ-
22 uals with experience with consumer and lifestyle im-
23 aging and creating publicity for a particular product
24 or service.

1 (5) To the maximum extent practicable, vet-
2 erans who have experience in press and public rela-
3 tions.

4 (c) DUTIES.—The advisory committee shall collabo-
5 rate with the Assistant Secretary for Public and Intergov-
6 ernmental Affairs—

7 (1) to ensure that the Department of Veterans
8 Affairs is strategically and effectively—

9 (A) engaging the public and Department
10 stakeholders to increase awareness nationally
11 regarding benefits and services furnished by the
12 Department;

13 (B) explaining new or changing policies of
14 the Department;

15 (C) improving the image and reputation of
16 the Department; and

17 (D) coordinating and collaborating with
18 national community-based organizations, non-
19 profits, and State and local government agen-
20 cies; and

21 (2) to assist the Secretary in conducting such
22 other press or public relations activities relating to
23 outreach activities of the Department as the advi-
24 sory committee considers appropriate.

1 (d) CONSULTATION.—The Secretary shall consult
2 with and seek the advice of the advisory committee not
3 less frequently than quarterly on matters relating to the
4 duties of the advisory committee under subsection (c).

5 (e) QUARTERLY REPORTS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not less frequently than
7 once every 90 days, the advisory committee shall
8 submit to Congress and to the Secretary a report on
9 outreach activities of the Department.

10 (2) RECOMMENDATIONS.—Each report sub-
11 mitted under paragraph (1) shall include such rec-
12 ommendations for legislative and administrative ac-
13 tion as the advisory committee considers appropriate
14 to improve the press and public relations of the De-
15 partment relating to outreach.

16 (f) TERMINATION.—The advisory committee shall
17 terminate on October 1, 2015, and the requirements and
18 authorities under this section shall terminate on such date.

19 (g) OUTREACH DEFINED.—In this section, the term
20 “outreach” has the meaning given the term in section
21 6301 of title 38, United States Code.

1 **SEC. 6. ADVISORY BOARDS ON OUTREACH ACTIVITIES AT**
2 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS MED-**
3 **ICAL CENTERS.**

4 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—For each Department of Vet-
5 erans Affairs medical center, the Secretary of Veterans Af-
6 fairs shall, acting through the director of such medical
7 center, establish not later than 180 days after the date
8 of the enactment of this Act an advisory board at such
9 medical center on matters relating to outreach activities
10 of the Department at such medical center.

11 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—Each advisory board established
12 under subsection (a) at a Department medical center shall
13 be, to the maximum extent practicable, composed of indi-
14 viduals selected by the Secretary from among the fol-
15 lowing:

16 (1) Individuals who are eminent in their respec-
17 tive fields of public relations.

18 (2) Representatives of organizations with offices
19 that focus on communications and distribute mes-
20 sages through major media news outlets and social
21 media.

22 (3) Individuals with experience communicating
23 financial results and business strategy for purposes
24 of shaping a confident brand image.

1 (4) Individuals with experience with consumer
2 and lifestyle imaging and creating publicity for a
3 particular product or service.

4 (5) Employees of the Department who are in-
5 volved in press and public relations strategy at the
6 medical center.

7 (6) To the maximum extent practicable, vet-
8 erans who have experience in press and public rela-
9 tions.

10 (c) DUTIES.—Each advisory board established under
11 subsection (a) at a Department medical center shall col-
12 laborate with the Assistant Secretary for Public and Inter-
13 governmental Affairs—

14 (1) to ensure that the Department of Veterans
15 Affairs is strategically and effectively—

16 (A) engaging the public and Department
17 stakeholders to increase awareness nationally
18 regarding benefits and services furnished by the
19 Department;

20 (B) explaining new or changing policies of
21 the Department;

22 (C) improving the image and reputation of
23 the Department; and

24 (D) coordinating and collaborating with
25 national community-based organizations, non-

1 profits, and State and local government agen-
2 cies; and

3 (2) to assist the director of such medical facility
4 in conducting such other press or public relations ac-
5 tivities relating to outreach activities of the Depart-
6 ment as the advisory board considers appropriate.

7 (d) CONSULTATION.—Each director of a Department
8 medical center shall consult with and seek the advice of
9 the advisory board established at such medical center not
10 less frequently than once every two months on matters re-
11 lating to the duties of the advisory board under subsection
12 (c).

13 (e) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Not less frequently than
14 each year, each advisory board established under sub-
15 section (a) shall submit to the Secretary a report with
16 such information as may be beneficial to the Secretary in
17 preparing the reports required by section 6308 of title 38,
18 United States Code.

19 (f) TERMINATION.—Each advisory board established
20 under subsection (a) and the authorities and requirements
21 of this section shall terminate on October 1, 2015.

1 **SEC. 7. MODIFICATION OF REQUIREMENT FOR PERIODIC**
2 **REPORTS TO CONGRESS ON OUTREACH AC-**
3 **TIVITIES OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
4 **FAIRS.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 6308 of title 38, United
6 States Code, is amended—

7 (1) in subsection (a), by striking “even-num-
8 bered”; and

9 (2) in subsection (b)—

10 (A) in paragraph (1), by striking “bien-
11 nial”;

12 (B) in paragraph (2), by inserting “for leg-
13 islative and administrative action” after “Rec-
14 ommendations”; and

15 (C) by adding at the end the following new
16 paragraph:

17 “(3) Recommendations that such administrative
18 actions as may be taken—

19 “(A) to maximize resources for outreach
20 activities of the Department; and

21 “(B) to focus outreach efforts on activities
22 that are proven to be more effective.”.

23 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—

24 (1) SECTION HEADING.—The heading for sec-
25 tion 6308 of such title is amended by striking “**Bi-**
26 **ennial**” and inserting “**Annual**”.

1 (2) TABLE OF SECTIONS.—The table of sections
2 at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is
3 amended by striking the item relating to section
4 6308 and inserting the following new item:

“6308. Annual report to Congress.”.

