

Union Calendar No. 549

114TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION

H. R. 3974

[Report No. 114–710]

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to establish pay grades and require competitive pay for physician assistants of the Department, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 5, 2015

Ms. KUSTER (for herself and Mr. HECK of Nevada) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

SEPTEMBER 6, 2016

Additional sponsors: Mr. FOSTER, Mr. CÁRDENAS, Mrs. KIRKPATRICK, Ms. BROWNLEY of California, Mr. TAKANO, Mr. GRIJALVA, and Ms. KAPTUR

SEPTEMBER 6, 2016

Reported with amendments, committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union, and ordered to be printed

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in *italic*]

[For text of introduced bill, see copy of bill as introduced on November 5, 2015]

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to establish pay grades and require competitive pay for physician assistants 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 “Grow Our Own Direc-*
 5 *tive: Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act*
 6 *of 2016”.*

7 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL AS-**
 8 **SISTANCE TO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS TO BE**
 9 **EMPLOYED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VET-**
 10 **ERANS AFFAIRS.**

11 *(a) PILOT PROGRAM.—*

12 *(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-*
 13 *fairs shall carry out a pilot program to be known as*
 14 *the “Grow Our Own Directive” or “G.O.O.D.” pilot*
 15 *program (in this section referred to as the “pilot pro-*
 16 *gram”) to provide educational assistance to certain*
 17 *former members of the Armed Forces for education*
 18 *and training as physician assistants of the Depart-*
 19 *ment of Veterans Affairs.*

20 *(2) INFORMATION ON PILOT PROGRAM.—The Sec-*
 21 *retary shall provide information on the pilot program*
 22 *to eligible individuals under subsection (b), including*
 23 *information on application requirements and a list of*
 24 *entities with which the Secretary has partnered under*
 25 *subsection (g).*

1 (b) *ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.*—*An individual is eligible*
2 *to participate in the pilot program if the individual—*

3 (1) *has medical or military health experience*
4 *gained while serving as a member of the Armed*
5 *Forces;*

6 (2) *has received a certificate, associate degree,*
7 *baccalaureate degree, master's degree, or*
8 *postbaccalaureate training in a science relating to*
9 *health care;*

10 (3) *has participated in the delivery of health*
11 *care services or related medical services, including*
12 *participation in military training relating to the*
13 *identification, evaluation, treatment, and prevention*
14 *of diseases and disorders; and*

15 (4) *does not have a degree of doctor of medicine,*
16 *doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry.*

17 (c) *DURATION.*—*The pilot program shall be carried*
18 *out during the five-year period beginning on the date that*
19 *is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.*

20 (d) *SELECTION.*—

21 (1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary shall select not*
22 *less than 250 eligible individuals under subsection (b)*
23 *to participate in the pilot program.*

24 (2) *PRIORITY FOR SELECTION.*—*In selecting in-*
25 *dividuals to participate in the pilot program under*

1 *paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give priority to the*
2 *following individuals:*

3 *(A) Individuals who participated in the In-*
4 *termediate Care Technician Pilot Program of the*
5 *Department that was carried out by the Sec-*
6 *retary between January 2011 and February*
7 *2015.*

8 *(B) Individuals who agree to be employed*
9 *as a physician assistant for the Veterans Health*
10 *Administration at a medical facility of the De-*
11 *partment located in a community that—*

12 *(i) is designated as a medically under-*
13 *served population under section*
14 *330(b)(3)(A) of the Public Health Service*
15 *Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(b)(3)(A)); and*

16 *(ii) is in a State with a per capita*
17 *population of veterans of more than 9 per-*
18 *cent according to the National Center for*
19 *Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the*
20 *United States Census Bureau.*

21 *(e) EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.—*

22 *(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot pro-*
23 *gram, the Secretary shall provide educational assist-*
24 *ance to individuals participating in the pilot pro-*
25 *gram, including through the use of scholarships, to*

1 *cover the costs to such individuals of obtaining a mas-*
2 *ter's degree in physician assistant studies or a simi-*
3 *lar master's degree.*

4 (2) *USE OF EXISTING PROGRAMS.*—*In providing*
5 *educational assistance under paragraph (1), the Sec-*
6 *retary shall use the Department of Veterans Affairs*
7 *Health Professionals Educational Assistance Program*
8 *under chapter 76 of title 38, United States Code, and*
9 *such other educational assistance programs of the De-*
10 *partment as the Secretary considers appropriate.*

11 (3) *USE OF SCHOLARSHIPS.*—*The Secretary*
12 *shall provide not less than 35 scholarships under the*
13 *pilot program to individuals participating in the*
14 *pilot program during each year in which the pilot*
15 *program is carried out.*

16 (f) *PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.*—

17 (1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary shall enter into*
18 *an agreement with each individual participating in*
19 *the pilot program in which such individual agrees to*
20 *be employed as a physician assistant for the Veterans*
21 *Health Administration for a period of obligated serv-*
22 *ice specified in paragraph (2).*

23 (2) *PERIOD SPECIFIED.*—*With respect to each*
24 *individual participating in the pilot program, the pe-*

1 *riod of obligated service specified in this paragraph*
2 *for the individual is—*

3 *(A) if the individual is participating in the*
4 *pilot program through a program described in*
5 *subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obli-*
6 *gated service, the period specified with respect to*
7 *such program; or*

8 *(B) if the individual is participating in the*
9 *pilot program other than through a program de-*
10 *scribed in such subsection, or if such program*
11 *does not specify a period of obligated service, a*
12 *period of three years or such other period as the*
13 *Secretary considers appropriate for purposes of*
14 *the pilot program.*

15 *(g) BREACH.—*

16 *(1) LIABILITY.—Except as provided in para-*
17 *graph (2), an individual who participates in the pilot*
18 *program and fails to satisfy the period of obligated*
19 *service under subsection (f) shall be liable to the*
20 *United States, in lieu of such obligated service, for the*
21 *amount that has been paid or is payable to or on be-*
22 *half of the individual under the pilot program, re-*
23 *duced by the proportion that the number of days*
24 *served for completion of the period of obligated service*

1 *bears to the total number of days in the period of ob-*
2 *ligated service of such individual.*

3 (2) *EXCEPTION.—If an individual is partici-*
4 *pating in the pilot program through a program de-*
5 *scribed in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of*
6 *obligated service, the liability of the individual for*
7 *failing to satisfy the period of obligated service under*
8 *subsection (f) shall be determined as specified with re-*
9 *spect to such program.*

10 (h) *MENTORS.—The Secretary shall ensure that a phy-*
11 *sician assistant mentor or mentors are available for indi-*
12 *viduals participating in the pilot program at each facility*
13 *of the Veterans Health Administration at which a partici-*
14 *pant in the pilot program is employed.*

15 (i) *PARTNERSHIPS.—In carrying out the pilot pro-*
16 *gram, the Secretary shall seek to partner with the following:*

17 (1) *Not less than 15 institutions of higher edu-*
18 *cation that—*

19 (A) *offer a master's degree program in phy-*
20 *sician assistant studies or a similar area of*
21 *study that is accredited by the Accreditation Re-*
22 *view Commission on Education for the Physi-*
23 *cian Assistant; and*

24 (B) *agree—*

1 (i) to guarantee seats in such master's
2 degree program for individuals partici-
3 pating in the pilot program who meet the
4 entrance requirements for such master's de-
5 gree program; and

6 (ii) to provide individuals partici-
7 pating in the pilot program with informa-
8 tion on admissions criteria and the admis-
9 sions process.

10 (2) Other institutions of higher education that
11 offer programs in physician assistant studies or other
12 similar areas of studies that are accredited by the Ac-
13 creditation Review Commission on Education for the
14 Physician Assistant.

15 (3) The Transition Assistance Program of the
16 Department of Defense.

17 (4) The Veterans' Employment and Training
18 Service of the Department of Labor.

19 (5) Programs carried out under chapter 41 of
20 title 38, United States Code, for the purpose of mar-
21 keting and advertising the pilot program to veterans
22 and members of the Armed Forces who may be inter-
23 ested in the pilot program.

24 (j) ADMINISTRATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—For pur-
25 poses of carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall

1 *appoint or select within the Office of Physician Assistant*
2 *Services of the Veterans Health Administration the fol-*
3 *lowing:*

4 *(1) A Deputy Director for Education and Career*
5 *Development of Physician Assistants who—*

6 *(A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and*
7 *employed by the Department as of the date of the*
8 *enactment of this Act;*

9 *(B) is responsible for—*

10 *(i) overseeing the pilot program;*

11 *(ii) recruiting candidates to partici-*
12 *pate in the pilot program;*

13 *(iii) coordinating with individuals*
14 *participating in the pilot program and as-*
15 *sisting those individuals in applying and*
16 *being admitted to a master's degree pro-*
17 *gram under the pilot program; and*

18 *(iv) providing information to eligible*
19 *individuals under subsection (b) with re-*
20 *spect to the pilot program; and*

21 *(C) may be employed in the field at a med-*
22 *ical center of the Department.*

23 *(2) A Deputy Director of Recruitment and Re-*
24 *tention who—*

1 (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and
2 employed by the Department as of the date of the
3 enactment of this Act;

4 (B) is responsible for—

5 (i) identifying and coordinating the
6 needs of the pilot program and assist the
7 Secretary in providing mentors under sub-
8 section (h) to participants in the pilot pro-
9 gram; and

10 (ii) coordinating the staff of facilities
11 of the Veterans Health Administration with
12 respect to identifying employment positions
13 and mentors under subsection (h) for par-
14 ticipants in the pilot program; and

15 (C) may be employed in the field at a med-
16 ical center of the Department.

17 (3) A recruiter who—

18 (A) reports directly to the Deputy Director
19 of Recruitment and Retention; and

20 (B) works with the Workforce Management
21 and Consulting Office and the Healthcare Talent
22 Management Office of the Veterans Health Ad-
23 ministration to develop and implement national
24 recruiting strategic plans for the recruitment

1 *and retention of physician assistants within the*
2 *Department.*

3 *(4) An administrative assistant, compensated at*
4 *a rate not less than level GS–6 of the General Sched-*
5 *ule, or equivalent, who assists with administrative*
6 *duties relating to the pilot program in the Office of*
7 *Physician Assistant Services and such other duties as*
8 *determined by the Secretary to ensure that the Office*
9 *runs effectively and efficiently.*

10 *(k) REPORT.—*

11 *(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after*
12 *the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of*
13 *Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Secretary*
14 *of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary*
15 *of Health and Human Services, shall submit to Con-*
16 *gress a report on the pilot program.*

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

19 *(A) The extent to which the pilot program*
20 *is effective in improving the ability of eligible in-*
21 *dividuals under subsection (b) to become physi-*
22 *cian assistants;*

23 *(B) An examination of whether the pilot*
24 *program is achieving the goals of—*

1 (i) enabling individuals to build on
2 medical skills gained as members of the
3 Armed Forces by entering into the physi-
4 cian assistant workforce of the Department;
5 and

6 (ii) helping to meet the shortage of
7 physician assistants employed by the De-
8 partment.

9 (C) An identification of such modifications
10 to the pilot program as the Secretary of Veterans
11 Affairs, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of
12 Defense, and the Secretary of Health and
13 Human Services consider necessary to meet the
14 goals described in subparagraph (B).

15 (D) An assessment of whether the pilot pro-
16 gram could serve as a model for other programs
17 of the Department to assist individuals in ob-
18 taining certification and employment in other
19 health care fields.

Amend the title so as to read: “A bill to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs.”.

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