

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 167

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the conduct of annual evaluations of mental health care and suicide prevention programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to require a pilot program on loan repayment for psychiatrists who agree to serve in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JANUARY 13, 2015

Mr. MCCAIN (for himself, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. BURR, Mr. MANCHIN, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. FLAKE, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, Mr. MORAN, Mr. MENENDEZ, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. SULLIVAN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. SANDERS, Ms. HIRONO, Mr. BROWN, Mr. TESTER, Mrs. MURRAY, Mr. DONNELLY, and Mr. CASEY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the conduct of annual evaluations of mental health care and suicide prevention programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to require a pilot program on loan repayment for psychiatrists who agree to serve in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 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 “Clay Hunt Suicide Pre-
3 vention for American Veterans Act” or the “Clay Hunt
4 SAV Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. EVALUATIONS OF MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND SUI-**
6 **CIDE PREVENTION PROGRAMS OF DEPART-**
7 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

8 (a) EVALUATIONS.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subchapter I of chapter 17
10 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by add-
11 ing at the end the following new section:

12 **“§ 1709B. Evaluations of mental health care and sui-**
13 **cide prevention programs**

14 “(a) EVALUATIONS.—(1) Not less frequently than
15 once during each period specified in paragraph (3), the
16 Secretary shall provide for the conduct of an evaluation
17 of the mental health care and suicide prevention programs
18 carried out under the laws administered by the Secretary.

19 “(2) Each evaluation conducted under paragraph (1)
20 shall—

21 “(A) use metrics that are common among and
22 useful for practitioners in the field of mental health
23 care and suicide prevention;

24 “(B) identify the most effective mental health
25 care and suicide prevention programs conducted by

1 the Secretary, including such programs conducted at
2 a Center of Excellence;

3 “(C) identify the cost-effectiveness of each pro-
4 gram identified under subparagraph (B);

5 “(D) measure the satisfaction of patients with
6 respect to the care provided under each such pro-
7 gram; and

8 “(E) propose best practices for caring for indi-
9 viduals who suffer from mental health disorders or
10 are at risk of suicide, including such practices con-
11 ducted or suggested by other departments or agen-
12 cies of the Federal Government, including the Sub-
13 stance Abuse and Mental Health Services Adminis-
14 tration of the Department of Health and Human
15 Services.

16 “(3) The periods specified in this paragraph are the
17 following:

18 “(A) The period beginning on the date on which
19 the Secretary awards the contract under paragraph
20 (4) and ending on September 30, 2018.

21 “(B) Each fiscal year beginning on or after Oc-
22 tober 1, 2018.

23 “(4) Not later than 180 days after the date of the
24 enactment of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for Amer-
25 ican Veterans Act, the Secretary shall seek to enter into

1 a contract with an independent third party unaffiliated
 2 with the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct eval-
 3 uations under paragraph (1).

4 “(5) The independent third party that is awarded the
 5 contract under paragraph (4) shall submit to the Sec-
 6 retary each evaluation conducted under paragraph (1).

7 “(b) ANNUAL SUBMISSION.—Not later than Decem-
 8 ber 1, 2018, and not less frequently than once each year
 9 thereafter, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee
 10 on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on
 11 Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Representatives a report
 12 that contains the following:

13 “(1) The most recent evaluations submitted to
 14 the Secretary under subsection (a)(5) that the Sec-
 15 retary has not previously submitted to such Commit-
 16 tees.

17 “(2) Any recommendations the Secretary con-
 18 siders appropriate.”.

19 (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-
 20 tions at the beginning of such chapter is amended
 21 by inserting after the item relating to section 1709A
 22 the following new item:

“1709B. Evaluations of mental health care and suicide prevention programs.”.

23 (b) INTERIM REPORTS.—Not later than September
 24 30 of each of 2016 and 2017, the Secretary of Veterans
 25 Affairs shall, in coordination with the independent third

1 party awarded a contract by the Secretary pursuant to
2 section 1709B(a)(4) of title 38, United States Code, as
3 added by subsection (a)(1), submit to the Committee on
4 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-
5 erans' Affairs of the House of Representatives a report
6 on the mental health care and suicide prevention programs
7 carried out under the laws administered by the Secretary
8 that includes, with respect to each such program, the fol-
9 lowing:

10 (1) A description of the program.

11 (2) The number of veterans served by the pro-
12 gram.

13 (3) The budget of the program.

14 (4) The number of full-time equivalent employ-
15 ees assigned to the program.

16 (5) Whether veterans may repeat participation
17 in the program or participate in the program in ad-
18 dition to other similar programs.

19 (6) Any study results or research published re-
20 garding the efficacy of the program.

21 (7) Any other information the Secretary deter-
22 mines appropriate.

1 **SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF INTERNET WEBSITE TO PROVIDE**
2 **INFORMATION REGARDING MENTAL HEALTH**
3 **CARE SERVICES.**

4 (a) IN GENERAL.—Using funds made available to the
5 Secretary of Veterans Affairs to publish the Internet
6 websites of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Sec-
7 retary shall survey the existing Internet websites and in-
8 formation resources of the Department and publish an
9 Internet website that serves as a centralized source to pro-
10 vide veterans with information regarding all of the mental
11 health care services provided under the laws administered
12 by the Secretary.

13 (b) ELEMENTS.—The Internet website published
14 under subsection (a) shall provide to veterans information
15 regarding all of the mental health care services available
16 in the Veteran Integrated Service Network in which the
17 veteran is seeking such services, including, with respect
18 to each medical center, Vet Center (as defined in section
19 1712A of title 38, United States Code), and community-
20 based outpatient clinic in the Veterans Integrated Service
21 Network—

22 (1) the name and contact information of each
23 social work office;

24 (2) the name and contact information of each
25 mental health clinic;

26 (3) a list of appropriate staff; and

1 (4) any other information the Secretary deter-
2 mines appropriate.

3 (c) UPDATED INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall
4 ensure that the information described in subsection (b)
5 that is published on the Internet website under subsection
6 (a) is updated not less than once every 90 days.

7 (d) OUTREACH.—In carrying out this section, the
8 Secretary shall ensure that the outreach conducted under
9 section 1720F(i) of title 38, United States Code, includes
10 information regarding the Internet website published
11 under subsection (a).

12 **SEC. 4. PILOT PROGRAM FOR REPAYMENT OF EDU-**
13 **CATIONAL LOANS FOR CERTAIN PSYCHIA-**
14 **TRISTS OF VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRA-**
15 **TION.**

16 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans
17 Affairs shall carry out a pilot program to repay loans of
18 individuals described in subsection (b) that—

19 (1) were used by such individuals to finance
20 education relating to psychiatric medicine, including
21 education leading to—

22 (A) a degree of doctor of medicine; or

23 (B) a degree of doctor of osteopathy; and

24 (2) were obtained from any of the following:

25 (A) A governmental entity.

1 (B) A private financial institution.

2 (C) A school.

3 (D) Any other authorized entity as deter-
4 mined by the Secretary.

5 (b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph (2), an
7 individual eligible for participation in the pilot pro-
8 gram is an individual who—

9 (A) either—

10 (i) is licensed or eligible for licensure
11 to practice psychiatric medicine in the Vet-
12 erans Health Administration of the De-
13 partment of Veterans Affairs; or

14 (ii) is enrolled in the final year of a
15 residency program leading to a specialty
16 qualification in psychiatric medicine that is
17 approved by the Accreditation Council for
18 Graduate Medical Education; and

19 (B) demonstrates a commitment to a long-
20 term career as a psychiatrist in the Veterans
21 Health Administration, as determined by the
22 Secretary.

23 (2) PROHIBITION ON SIMULTANEOUS ELIGI-
24 BILITY.—An individual who is participating in any
25 other program of the Federal Government that re-

1 pays the educational loans of the individual is not el-
2 igible to participate in the pilot program.

3 (c) SELECTION.—The Secretary shall select not less
4 than 10 individuals described in subsection (b) to partici-
5 pate in the pilot program for each year in which the Sec-
6 retary carries out the pilot program.

7 (d) PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.—The Sec-
8 retary shall enter into an agreement with each individual
9 selected under subsection (c) in which such individual
10 agrees to serve a period of two or more years of obligated
11 service for the Veterans Health Administration in the field
12 of psychiatric medicine, as determined by the Secretary.

13 (e) LOAN REPAYMENTS.—

14 (1) AMOUNTS.—Subject to paragraph (2), a
15 loan repayment under this section may consist of
16 payment of the principal, interest, and related ex-
17 penses of a loan obtained by an individual who is
18 participating in the pilot program for all educational
19 expenses (including tuition, fees, books, and labora-
20 tory expenses) of such individual relating to edu-
21 cation described in subsection (a)(1).

22 (2) LIMIT.—For each year of obligated service
23 that an individual who is participating in the pilot
24 program agrees to serve under subsection (d), the

1 Secretary may pay not more than \$30,000 in loan
2 repayment on behalf of such individual.

3 (f) BREACH.—

4 (1) LIABILITY.—An individual who participates
5 in the pilot program and fails to satisfy the period
6 of obligated service under subsection (d) shall be lia-
7 ble to the United States, in lieu of such obligated
8 service, for the amount that has been paid or is pay-
9 able to or on behalf of the individual under the pilot
10 program, reduced by the proportion that the number
11 of days served for completion of the period of obli-
12 gated service bears to the total number of days in
13 the period of obligated service of such individual.

14 (2) REPAYMENT PERIOD.—Any amount of dam-
15 ages that the United States is entitled to recover
16 under this subsection shall be paid to the United
17 States not later than one year after the date of the
18 breach of the agreement.

19 (g) REPORT.—

20 (1) INITIAL REPORT.—Not later than two years
21 after the date on which the pilot program under sub-
22 section (a) commences, the Secretary shall submit to
23 the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate
24 and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the

1 House of Representatives a report on the pilot pro-
2 gram.

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

5 (A) The number of individuals who partici-
6 pated in the pilot program, including the num-
7 ber of new hires.

8 (B) The locations in which such individuals
9 were employed by the Department, including
10 how many such locations were rural or urban
11 locations.

12 (C) An assessment of the quality of the
13 work performed by such individuals in the
14 course of such employment, including the per-
15 formance reviews of such individuals.

16 (D) The number of psychiatrists the Sec-
17 retary determines is needed by the Department
18 in the future.

19 (3) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days
20 before the date on which the pilot program termi-
21 nates under subsection (i), the Secretary shall sub-
22 mit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the
23 Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of
24 the House of Representatives an update to the re-
25 port submitted under paragraph (1) and any rec-

1 ommendations that the Secretary considers appro-
2 priate.

3 (h) REGULATIONS.—The Secretary shall prescribe
4 regulations to carry out this section, including standards
5 for qualified loans and authorized payees and other terms
6 and conditions for the making of loan repayments.

7 (i) TERMINATION.—The authority to carry out the
8 pilot program shall expire on the date that is three years
9 after the date on which the Secretary commences the pilot
10 program.

11 **SEC. 5. PILOT PROGRAM ON COMMUNITY OUTREACH.**

12 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
13 shall establish a pilot program to assist veterans
14 transitioning from serving as a member of the Armed
15 Forces on active duty and to improve the access of vet-
16 erans to mental health services.

17 (b) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall carry out the
18 pilot program under subsection (a) at not less than five
19 Veterans Integrated Service Networks that have a large
20 population of veterans who—

21 (1) served in the reserve components of the
22 Armed Forces; or

23 (2) are transitioning into communities with an
24 established population of veterans after having re-
25 cently separated from the Armed Forces.

1 (c) FUNCTIONS.—The pilot program at each Vet-
2 erans Integrated Service Network selected to carry out the
3 pilot program under subsection (b) shall include the fol-
4 lowing:

5 (1) A community oriented veteran peer support
6 network, carried out in partnership with an appro-
7 priate entity with experience in peer support pro-
8 grams, that—

9 (A) establishes peer support training
10 guidelines;

11 (B) develops a network of veteran peer
12 support counselors to meet the demands of the
13 communities in the Veterans Integrated Service
14 Network;

15 (C) conducts training of veteran peer sup-
16 port counselors;

17 (D) with respect to one medical center se-
18 lected by the Secretary in each such Veterans
19 Integrated Service Network, has—

20 (i) a designated peer support spe-
21 cialist who acts as a liaison to the commu-
22 nity oriented veteran peer network; and

23 (ii) a certified mental health profes-
24 sional designated as the community ori-
25 ented veteran peer network mentor; and

1 (E) is readily available to veterans, includ-
 2 ing pursuant to the Veterans Integrated Service
 3 Network cooperating and working with State
 4 and local governments and appropriate entities.

5 (2) A community outreach team for each med-
 6 ical center selected by the Secretary pursuant to
 7 paragraph (1)(D) that—

8 (A) assists veterans transitioning into com-
 9 munities;

10 (B) establishes a veteran transition advi-
 11 sory group to facilitate outreach activities;

12 (C) includes the participation of appro-
 13 priate community organizations, State and local
 14 governments, colleges and universities, cham-
 15 bers of commerce and other local business orga-
 16 nizations, and organizations that provide legal
 17 aid or advice; and

18 (D) coordinates with the Veterans Inte-
 19 grated Service Network regarding the Veterans
 20 Integrated Service Network carrying out an an-
 21 nual mental health summit to assess the status
 22 of mental health care for veterans in the com-
 23 munity and to develop new or innovative means
 24 to provide mental health services to veterans.

25 (d) REPORTS.—

1 (1) INITIAL REPORT.—

2 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 540
3 days after the date on which the pilot program
4 under subsection (a) commences, the Secretary
5 shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Af-
6 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on Vet-
7 erans' Affairs of the House of Representatives
8 a report on the pilot program.

9 (B) ELEMENTS.—With respect to each
10 Veterans Integrated Service Network selected to
11 carry out the pilot program under subsection
12 (b), the report under subparagraph (A) shall in-
13 clude—

14 (i) a full description of the peer sup-
15 port model implemented under the pilot
16 program, participation data, and data per-
17 taining to past and current mental health
18 related hospitalizations and fatalities;

19 (ii) recommendations on implementing
20 peer support networks throughout the De-
21 partment;

22 (iii) whether the mental health re-
23 sources made available under the pilot pro-
24 gram for members of the reserve compo-
25 nents of the Armed Forces is effective; and

1 (iv) a full description of the activities
2 and effectiveness of community outreach
3 coordinating teams under the pilot pro-
4 gram, including partnerships that have
5 been established with appropriate entities.

6 (2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than 90 days
7 before the date on which the pilot program termi-
8 nates under subsection (e), the Secretary shall sub-
9 mit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the
10 Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of
11 the House of Representatives an update to the re-
12 port submitted under paragraph (1).

13 (e) CONSTRUCTION.—This section may not be con-
14 strued to authorize the Secretary to hire additional em-
15 ployees of the Department to carry out the pilot program
16 under subsection (a).

17 (f) TERMINATION.—The authority of the Secretary to
18 carry out the pilot program under subsection (a) shall ter-
19 minate on the date that is three years after the date on
20 which the pilot program commences.

1 **SEC. 6. COLLABORATION ON SUICIDE PREVENTION EF-**
2 **FORTS BETWEEN DEPARTMENT OF VET-**
3 **ERANS AFFAIRS AND NON-PROFIT MENTAL**
4 **HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS.**

5 (a) **COLLABORATION.**—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
6 fairs may collaborate with non-profit mental health orga-
7 nizations to prevent suicide among veterans as follows:

8 (1) To improve the efficiency and effectiveness
9 of suicide prevention efforts carried out by the Sec-
10 retary and non-profit mental health organizations.

11 (2) To assist non-profit mental health organiza-
12 tions with the suicide prevention efforts of such or-
13 ganizations through the use of the expertise of em-
14 ployees of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

15 (3) To jointly carry out suicide prevention ef-
16 forts.

17 (b) **EXCHANGE OF RESOURCES.**—In carrying out any
18 collaboration under subsection (a), the Secretary and any
19 non-profit mental health organization with which the Sec-
20 retary is collaborating under such subsection shall ex-
21 change training sessions and best practices to help with
22 the suicide prevention efforts of the Department and such
23 organization.

24 (c) **DIRECTOR OF SUICIDE PREVENTION COORDINA-**
25 **TION.**—The Secretary shall select within the Department
26 a Director of Suicide Prevention Coordination to under-

1 take any collaboration with non-profit mental health orga-
 2 nizations under this section or any other provision of law.

3 **SEC. 7. ADDITIONAL PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR HEALTH**
 4 **CARE FOR CERTAIN VETERANS OF COMBAT**
 5 **SERVICE DURING CERTAIN PERIODS OF HOS-**
 6 **TILITIES AND WAR.**

7 Paragraph (3) of section 1710(e) of title 38, United
 8 States Code, is amended to read as follows:

9 “(3) In the case of care for a veteran described in
 10 paragraph (1)(D), hospital care, medical services, and
 11 nursing home care may be provided under or by virtue
 12 of subsection (a)(2)(F) only during the following periods:

13 “(A) Except as provided by subparagraph (B),
 14 with respect to a veteran described in paragraph
 15 (1)(D) who is discharged or released from the active
 16 military, naval, or air service after January 27,
 17 2003, the five-year period beginning on the date of
 18 such discharge or release.

19 “(B) With respect to a veteran described in
 20 paragraph (1)(D) who is discharged or released from
 21 the active military, naval, or air service after Janu-
 22 ary 1, 2009, and before January 1, 2011, but did
 23 not enroll to receive such hospital care, medical serv-
 24 ices, or nursing home care pursuant to such para-
 25 graph during the five-year period beginning on the

1 date of such discharge or release, the one-year pe-
2 riod beginning on the date of the enactment of the
3 Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Vet-
4 erans Act.

5 “(C) With respect to a veteran described in
6 paragraph (1)(D) who is discharged or released from
7 the active military, naval, or air service on or before
8 January 27, 2003, and did not enroll in the patient
9 enrollment system under section 1705 of this title on
10 or before such date, the three-year period beginning
11 on January 27, 2008.”.

12 **SEC. 8. PROHIBITION ON NEW APPROPRIATIONS.**

13 No additional funds are authorized to be appro-
14 priated to carry out this Act and the amendments made
15 by this Act, and this Act and such amendments shall be
16 carried out using amounts otherwise made available for
17 such purposes.

○