

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1797

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a voluntary national directory of veterans to support outreach to veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 16, 2015

Ms. HEITKAMP (for herself, Mr. MORAN, Mr. KING, and Mr. BOOZMAN) 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 establish a voluntary national directory of veterans to support outreach to veterans, 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 “Connect with Veterans
5 Act of 2015”.

6 **SEC. 2. VOLUNTARY NATIONAL DIRECTORY OF VETERANS.**

7 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
9 Affairs, in coordination with the Secretary of De-

1 fense, shall establish a program to facilitate outreach
2 to veterans by covered entities.

3 (2) COVERED ENTITIES.—For purposes of this
4 section, a covered entity is any of the following:

5 (A) The Department of Veterans Affairs.

6 (B) The agency or department of a State
7 that is the primary agency or department of the
8 State for the administration of benefits and
9 services for veterans in the State.

10 (C) A political subdivision of a State.

11 (D) An Indian tribe (as defined in section
12 4 of the Indian Self-Determination and Edu-
13 cation Assistance Act (25 U.S.C. 450b)).

14 (3) NATIONAL DIRECTORY.—To carry out the
15 program required by paragraph (1), the Secretary of
16 Veterans Affairs shall—

17 (A) establish a national directory of vet-
18 erans as described in subsection (b); and

19 (B) share information in the directory in
20 accordance with subsection (c).

21 (b) NATIONAL DIRECTORY.—

22 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
23 Affairs shall establish the national directory required
24 by subsection (a)(3) using information received from
25 the Secretary of Defense under subsection (d)(4).

1 (2) UPDATES.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
2 fairs shall ensure that the national directory includes
3 a mechanism by which a participating individual can
4 update the information in the national directory that
5 pertains to the participating individual.

6 (3) DISENROLLMENT.—The Secretary shall es-
7 tablish a mechanism by which a participating indi-
8 vidual can indicate to the Secretary that the indi-
9 vidual would no longer like to receive information
10 from participating entities under the program.

11 (4) REENROLLMENT.—The Secretary shall es-
12 tablish a mechanism for the inclusion of information
13 in the national directory of individuals who were pre-
14 viously participating individuals but who had made
15 an indication under paragraph (3) and subsequently
16 indicate that they would like to receive information
17 from participating entities under the program.

18 (5) PRIVACY AND SECURITY.—The Secretary
19 shall take such actions as the Secretary considers
20 appropriate to protect—

21 (A) the privacy of individuals participating
22 in the program; and

23 (B) the security of the information stored
24 in the national directory.

1 (6) EBENEFITS.—The Secretary of Veterans
2 Affairs may use the system and architecture of the
3 eBenefits Internet website of the Department of Vet-
4 erans Affairs to support and operate the national di-
5 rectory as the Secretary considers appropriate.

6 (c) OUTREACH.—

7 (1) SHARING OF DIRECTORY INFORMATION.—

8 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in
9 paragraph (2), in order to connect participating
10 individuals with information about the pro-
11 grams they could be eligible for or services, sup-
12 port, and information they may be interested in
13 receiving, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may
14 share, under the program established under
15 subsection (a)(1), information in the national
16 directory concerning such individuals with enti-
17 ties applicable to participating individuals.

18 (B) ENTITIES APPLICABLE TO PARTICI-
19 PATING INDIVIDUALS.—For purposes of this
20 subsection, an entity that is applicable to a par-
21 ticipating individual is a covered entity from
22 whom a participating individual has expressed
23 interest in receiving information under the pro-
24 gram.

1 (C) UPDATED INFORMATION.—In a case in
2 which a participating individual updates the in-
3 formation pertaining to the participating indi-
4 vidual under subsection (b)(2), the Secretary
5 shall transmit such information to each entity
6 applicable to the participating individual.

7 (D) NOTIFICATION OF DISENROLLMENT.—
8 In a case in which a participating individual in-
9 dicates to the Secretary under subsection (b)(3)
10 that the individual would no longer like to re-
11 ceive information from participating entities
12 under the program, the Secretary shall inform
13 each entity applicable to the participating indi-
14 vidual that the individual would no longer like
15 to receive information from the entity under the
16 program.

17 (2) LIMITATIONS.—

18 (A) LIMITATIONS ON THE SECRETARY.—

19 (i) INFORMATION SHARED.—Under
20 the program, the Secretary of Veterans Af-
21 fairs may only share from the national di-
22 rectory the following:

23 (I) The name of a participating
24 individual.

1 (II) The e-mail address of a par-
2 ticipating individual.

3 (III) The postal address of a par-
4 ticipating individual.

5 (IV) The phone number of a par-
6 ticipating individual.

7 (V) Information on the types of
8 benefits and services for which a par-
9 ticipating individual would like to re-
10 ceive communication and outreach, as
11 collected under subsection
12 (d)(2)(B)(iii).

13 (ii) PROHIBITION ON SALE OF INFOR-
14 MATION.—The Secretary may not sell any
15 information collected under this section.

16 (iii) ENTITIES.—The Secretary may
17 not share any information collected under
18 the program with any entity that is not a
19 participating entity.

20 (B) LIMITATIONS ON PARTICIPATING ENTI-
21 TIES.—

22 (i) SHARING WITH THIRD-PARTY AND
23 FOR-PROFIT ENTITIES.—As a condition of
24 participation in the program, a partici-
25 pating entity shall agree not to share any

1 information the participating entity re-
 2 ceives under the program with any third-
 3 party or for-profit entity.

4 (ii) PURCHASES OF PRODUCTS OR
 5 SERVICES.—As a condition of participation
 6 in the program, a participating entity shall
 7 agree not to include in any information
 8 sent by the participating entity to a par-
 9 ticipating individual a requirement that the
 10 participating individual or the family of the
 11 participating individual purchase a product
 12 or service.

13 (iii) POLITICAL COMMUNICATION.—As
 14 a condition of participation in the pro-
 15 gram, a participating entity shall agree not
 16 to use any information received under the
 17 program for any political communication.

18 (3) DISENROLLMENT BY PARTICIPATING ENTI-
 19 TIES.—The Secretary shall establish a mechanism
 20 by which a participating entity may indicate to the
 21 Secretary that the participating entity would no
 22 longer like to receive information about participating
 23 individuals from the national directory.

24 (4) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—

1 (A) CONSOLIDATION OF REQUESTS.—It is
2 the sense of Congress that covered entities de-
3 scribed in subsection (a)(2)(C) who are located
4 in the same region should work together in a
5 manner such that only one of them requests re-
6 ceipt of information under the program.

7 (B) COLLABORATION.—It is the sense of
8 Congress that covered entities described in sub-
9 section (a)(2)(C) should work with third par-
10 ties, such as veterans service organizations,
11 military community groups, and other entities
12 with an interest in assisting veterans, to develop
13 the information the covered entities send to
14 participating individuals under the program.

15 (5) PUBLICITY.—The Secretary shall develop a
16 plan to publicize the program and inform covered
17 entities of the benefits of participating in the pro-
18 gram.

19 (d) COLLECTION OF CONTACT INFORMATION.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—To each member of the
21 Armed Forces separating from service in the Armed
22 Forces, the Secretary of Defense shall provide a
23 form for the collection of information to be included
24 in the national directory established under sub-
25 section (a).

1 (2) FORM.—

2 (A) DEVELOPMENT.—The Secretary of
3 Defense shall, in consultation with the Sec-
4 retary of Veterans Affairs, develop the form
5 provided under paragraph (1).

6 (B) ELEMENTS.—The form developed
7 under subparagraph (A) shall allow a member
8 of the Armed Forces who is in the process of
9 separating from service in the Armed Forces to
10 indicate the following:

11 (i) Where the member intends to re-
12 side after separation.

13 (ii) How the individual can best be
14 contacted, such as a telephone number, an
15 e-mail address, or a postal address.

16 (iii) For which types of benefits and
17 services the member would like to receive
18 communication and outreach, such as
19 health care, education, employment, and
20 housing.

21 (iv) From which of the following the
22 member would like to receive the commu-
23 nication and outreach specified under
24 clause (iii):

1 (I) The Department of Veterans
2 Affairs.

3 (II) The agency or department of
4 the State in which the member in-
5 tends to reside after separation that is
6 the primary agency or department of
7 the State for the administration of
8 benefits and services for veterans in
9 the State.

10 (III) A political subdivision of a
11 State.

12 (C) NOTICE.—The form developed under
13 subparagraph (A) shall include notice of the fol-
14 lowing:

15 (i) Information provided to agencies
16 and departments described in subpara-
17 graph (B)(iv)(II) will only be provided as
18 authorized and upon request by such agen-
19 cies and departments.

20 (ii) Political subdivisions of States
21 that receive information under the pro-
22 gram established under subsection (a)
23 may—

24 (I) share such information with
25 such nonprofit organizations as the

1 political subdivisions consider appro-
2 priate; and

3 (II) work with such organizations
4 to provide the veterans with relevant
5 information about benefits and serv-
6 ices offered by such organizations.

7 (iii) Information provided on the form
8 developed under subparagraph (A) will
9 never be sold, provided to a for-profit enti-
10 ty, or used to send any sort of political
11 communication.

12 (D) MANNER.—The Secretary of Defense
13 shall ensure that the form provided under para-
14 graph (1) is not primarily electronic in nature.

15 (3) VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION.—The Sec-
16 retary of Defense shall ensure that completion of the
17 form provided under paragraph (1) is voluntary and
18 submittal of such form to the Secretary by a mem-
19 ber of the Armed Forces shall be considered an indi-
20 cation to the Secretary that the member would like
21 to receive information from participating entities
22 under the program.

23 (4) TRANSMITTAL OF INFORMATION TO SEC-
24 RETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.—Not later than 30
25 days after the date on which a member of the

1 Armed Forces who submitted information to the
2 Secretary of Defense under this subsection separates
3 from service in the Armed Forces, the Secretary of
4 Defense shall transmit such information to the Sec-
5 retary of Veterans Affairs.

6 (5) PRIVACY AND SECURITY.—The Secretary of
7 Defense shall take such actions as the Secretary
8 considers appropriate to protect—

9 (A) the privacy of individuals who submit
10 information under this subsection; and

11 (B) the security of such information—

12 (i) while it is in the possession of the
13 Secretary; and

14 (ii) while it is in transit to the Sec-
15 retary of Veterans Affairs.

16 (6) INTEGRATION WITH TRANSITION ASSIST-
17 ANCE PROGRAM.—The Secretary of Defense and the
18 Secretary of Labor shall jointly take such actions as
19 the secretaries consider appropriate to integrate the
20 collection of information under this subsection into
21 the Transition Assistance Program.

22 (e) REPORT.—

23 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
24 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
25 retary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of De-

1 fense shall jointly submit to the appropriate commit-
2 tees of Congress a report on the program established
3 under subsection (a)(1).

4 (2) CONTENTS.—The report submitted under
5 paragraph (1) shall include an examination and as-
6 sessment of the following:

7 (A) The signup process and the effective-
8 ness of the forms developed and provided under
9 subsection (d).

10 (B) The ways in which contact information
11 is transferred from the Secretary of Defense to
12 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs under the
13 program and the plans of the secretaries to
14 overcome challenges encountered by the secre-
15 taries in transferring such information.

16 (C) The number of covered entities de-
17 scribed in subsection (a)(2)(C) participating in
18 the program and any challenges they report in
19 receiving the contact information from the Sec-
20 retary of Veterans Affairs under the program.

21 (D) The effectiveness of efforts of the Sec-
22 retary of Veterans Affairs and the Secretary of
23 Defense to protect the personal information of
24 participating individuals.

1 (E) The effectiveness of efforts of covered
2 entities described in subsection (a)(2)(C) to
3 protect the personal information of partici-
4 pating individuals.

5 (F) Whether additional limitations on the
6 use of information collected under the program
7 are necessary to protect participating individ-
8 uals from unwanted contact, or contact that is
9 inconsistent with the program.

10 (G) Whether participating individuals are
11 benefitting by participating in the program and
12 whether changing the program would improve
13 such benefits.

14 (H) The overall participation in the pro-
15 gram, utilization of the program, and how such
16 participation and utilization could be improved.

17 (I) Such other matters as the secretaries
18 consider appropriate.

19 (3) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS
20 DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term “appro-
21 priate committees of Congress” means the following:

22 (A) The Committee on Veterans’ Affairs,
23 the Committee on Armed Services, and the
24 Subcommittee on Military Construction, Vet-

erans Affairs, and Related Agencies of the
Committee on Appropriations of the Senate.

(B) The Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
the Committee on Armed Services, and the
Subcommittee on Military Construction, Vet-
erans Affairs and Related Agencies of the Com-
mittee on Appropriations of the House of Rep-
resentatives.

(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) PARTICIPATING ENTITY.—The term “par-
ticipating entity” means a covered entity that has
indicated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs that
the covered entity would like to receive information
about participating individuals from the national di-
rectory and has made no subsequent indication that
the covered entity would like to stop receiving such
information.

(2) PARTICIPATING INDIVIDUAL.—The term
“participating individual” means an individual with
respect to whom information is stored in the na-
tional directory and who has indicated to the Sec-
retary of Veterans Affairs or the Secretary of De-
fense that the individual would like to receive infor-
mation from participating entities under the pro-
gram and has made no subsequent indication that

- 1 the individual would like to stop receiving such infor-
- 2 mation.

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