

114TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 3434

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve the provision of services and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans who experience domestic violence or sexual assault, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 28, 2016

Mrs. SHAHEEN 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 improve the provision of services and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans who experience domestic violence or sexual assault, 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 “Violence Against
5 Women Veterans Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

2 The purpose of this Act is to better integrate the
3 medical, housing, mental health, and other benefits pro-
4 vided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (in this Act
5 referred to as the “Department”) with existing commu-
6 nity-based domestic violence and sexual assault services—

7 (1) to provide a more efficient and coordinated
8 network of support for veterans experiencing domes-
9 tic violence or sexual assault; and

10 (2) to better understand the impact of domestic
11 violence and sexual assault on veterans, particularly
12 female veterans.

13 **SEC. 3. PROGRAM TO ASSIST VETERANS WHO EXPERIENCE**
14 **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL ASSAULT.**

15 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
16 erans Affairs (in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”)
17 shall carry out a program to assist veterans that have ex-
18 perience or are experiencing domestic violence or sexual
19 assault in accessing benefits from the Department, includ-
20 ing coordinating access to medical treatment centers,
21 housing assistance, and other benefits from the Depart-
22 ment.

23 (b) PARTNERSHIP.—The Secretary shall carry out
24 the program under subsection (a) in partnership with—

- 25 (1) domestic violence shelters and programs;
26 (2) rape crisis centers;

1 (3) State domestic violence and sexual assault
2 coalitions; and

3 (4) such other health care or other service pro-
4 viders that serve domestic violence or sexual assault
5 victims as determined by the Secretary, particularly
6 those providing emergency services or housing assist-
7 ance.

8 (c) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—In carrying out the
9 program under subsection (a), the Secretary may conduct
10 the following activities:

11 (1) Training for community-based domestic vio-
12 lence or sexual assault service providers on—

13 (A) identifying veterans who have been vic-
14 tims of domestic violence or sexual assault;

15 (B) coordinating with local service pro-
16 viders of the Department; and

17 (C) connecting veterans with appropriate
18 housing, mental health, medical, and other fi-
19 nancial assistance or benefits from the Depart-
20 ment.

21 (2) Assistance to service providers to ensure ac-
22 cess of veterans to domestic violence and sexual as-
23 sault emergency services, particularly in underserved
24 areas, including services for members of Indian
25 tribes.

1 (3) Such other outreach and assistance as the
 2 Secretary determines necessary for the provision of
 3 assistance under subsection (a).

4 (d) DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT
 5 OUTREACH COORDINATORS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—In order to effectively assist
 7 veterans who have experienced domestic violence or
 8 sexual assault, the Secretary may establish local co-
 9 ordinators to provide outreach under the program
 10 required by subsection (a).

11 (2) LOCAL COORDINATOR KNOWLEDGE.—The
 12 Secretary shall ensure that each coordinator estab-
 13 lished under paragraph (1) is knowledgeable about—

14 (A) the dynamics of domestic violence and
 15 sexual assault, including safety concerns, legal
 16 protections, and the need for the provision of
 17 confidential services;

18 (B) veteran eligibility for Department serv-
 19 ices and benefits relevant to recovery from do-
 20 mestic violence and sexual assault, particularly
 21 emergency housing assistance, mental health
 22 care, other health care, and disability benefits;
 23 and

24 (C) local community resources addressing
 25 domestic violence and sexual assault.

1 (3) LOCAL COORDINATOR ASSISTANCE.—Each
2 coordinator established under paragraph (1) shall
3 assist domestic violence shelters and rape crisis cen-
4 ters in providing services to veterans.

5 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON VETERANS EXPERI-**
6 **ENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL AS-**
7 **SAULT.**

8 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
9 fairs, in consultation with the Attorney General and the
10 Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall establish
11 a national task force (in this section referred to as the
12 “Task Force”) to develop a comprehensive national pro-
13 gram, including by integrating facilities, services, and ben-
14 efits of the Department into existing networks of commu-
15 nity-based domestic violence and sexual assault services,
16 to address domestic violence and sexual assault among vet-
17 erans.

18 (b) CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS.—In car-
19 rying out this section, the Task Force shall consult with—

20 (1) representatives from not fewer than 3 na-
21 tional organizations and State coalitions with dem-
22 onstrated expertise in domestic violence prevention,
23 response, or advocacy; and

24 (2) representatives from not fewer than 3 na-
25 tional organizations and State coalitions, particularly

1 those representing underserved or ethnic minority
2 communities, with demonstrated expertise in sexual
3 assault prevention, response, or advocacy.

4 (c) DUTIES.—The duties of the Task Force shall in-
5 clude the following:

6 (1) To review existing services and policies of
7 the Department and develop a comprehensive na-
8 tional program to address domestic violence and sex-
9 ual assault prevention, response, and treatment.

10 (2) To review the feasibility and advisability of
11 establishing an expedited process to secure emer-
12 gency, temporary benefits, including housing or
13 other benefits, for veterans who are experiencing do-
14 mestic violence or sexual assault.

15 (3) To review and make recommendations re-
16 garding the feasibility and advisability of estab-
17 lishing dedicated, temporary housing assistance for
18 veterans experiencing domestic violence or sexual as-
19 sault.

20 (4) To identify any requirements regarding do-
21 mestic violence assistance or sexual assault response
22 and services that are not being met by the Depart-
23 ment and make recommendations on how the De-
24 partment can meet such requirements.

1 (5) To review and make recommendations re-
2 garding the feasibility and advisability of providing
3 direct services or contracting for community-based
4 services for veterans in response to a sexual assault,
5 including through the use of sexual assault nurse ex-
6 aminers, particularly in underserved or remote
7 areas, including services for members of Indian
8 tribes.

9 (6) To review the availability of counseling serv-
10 ices provided by the Department and through peer
11 network support, and to provide recommendations
12 for the enhancement of such services, to address—

13 (A) the perpetration of domestic violence
14 and sexual assault; and

15 (B) the recovery of veterans, particularly
16 female veterans, from domestic violence and
17 sexual assault.

18 (7) To review and make recommendations to
19 expand services available for veterans at risk of per-
20 petrating domestic violence.

21 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
22 of the enactment of this Act, and not less frequently than
23 annually thereafter, the Task Force shall submit to the
24 Secretary and Congress a report on the activities of the

1 Task Force, including any recommendations for legislative
2 or administrative action.

3 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL BASELINE STUDY ON PROBLEM OF DO-**
4 **MESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT**
5 **AMONG VETERANS AND SPOUSES OF VET-**
6 **ERANS.**

7 The Secretary, in consultation with the Attorney
8 General, shall conduct a national baseline study to exam-
9 ine the scope of the problem of domestic violence and sex-
10 ual assault among veterans and spouses of veterans.

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