

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 5951

To establish the Veterans Crisis Response Corps, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 23, 2018

Mr. SCHIFF (for himself, Mr. MOULTON, and Ms. JACKSON LEE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, and in addition to the Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure, Foreign Affairs, and Armed Services, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To establish the Veterans Crisis Response Corps, 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 “Veterans Crisis Re-
5 sponse Corps Act of 2018”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) The United States has a long history of re-
9 sponding to natural and man-made crises both do-

1 mestic and abroad. These efforts secure the safety
2 and security of our citizens at home and overseas,
3 help to build a more peaceful, prosperous, and se-
4 cure world, to the long-term benefit of the United
5 States and the international community.

6 (2) Following major natural disasters, the De-
7 partment of Defense has an unmatched logistical
8 and operational capacity to provide rapid response
9 across the globe. In recent years, Department of De-
10 fense assets have played a key role in responding to
11 domestic and international crises including the 2004
12 tsunami in the Indian Ocean, Hurricane Katrina in
13 2005, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2011 earth-
14 quake and tsunami in Japan, Hurricane Sandy in
15 2012, and Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017.

16 (3) The Department of Defense's crisis re-
17 sponse mission serves the interests of the United
18 States by supporting domestic response to aid the
19 homeland and abroad by deepening cooperation with
20 regional partners, and providing a platform for pub-
21 lic diplomacy and outreach.

22 (4) The Department of Defense's role following
23 disasters is temporary, typically spanning the imme-
24 diate aftermath of a disaster, focusing on the provi-
25 sion of equipment, support, food and water, and

1 medical care. When Department of Defense assets
2 withdraw, the work of repairing infrastructure can
3 take months or years.

4 (5) More than 2,400,000 members of the
5 Armed Forces have separated from the Armed
6 Forces since September 11, 2001. Unemployment
7 remains a serious problem for veterans, with
8 500,000 veterans unemployed at some point in
9 2016. Many veterans leave the Armed Forces with
10 a continued desire to serve, as well as skills and ex-
11 perience that make them invaluable in a disaster re-
12 lief and reconstruction setting.

13 (6) Nonprofit organizations such as Team Ru-
14 bicon, the Mission Continues, and others provide
15 service opportunities for veterans to apply their
16 skills to community service projects, including dis-
17 aster relief and reconstruction.

18 (7) There is a pressing need to provide service
19 and employment opportunities for veterans and it is
20 in the interests of the United States to assist in re-
21 construction projects following national disasters in
22 order to promote American values and as an exercise
23 of public diplomacy.

24 (8) The establishment of a Veterans Crisis Re-
25 sponse Corps would leverage the unique skills of vet-

1 erans to the benefit of the United States, supporting
2 the safety and security of the homeland, building
3 good will overseas and providing productive, mean-
4 ingful work opportunities to veterans.

5 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF VETERANS CRISIS RESPONSE**
6 **CORPS.**

7 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the ex-
8 ecutive branch of the Federal Government an independent
9 agency to be known as the Veterans Crisis Response
10 Corps.

11 (b) DIRECTOR.—There shall be a Director of the Vet-
12 erans Crisis Response Corps, who is the head of the Vet-
13 erans Crisis Response Corps. The Director shall be ap-
14 pointed by the President, by and with the advice and con-
15 sent of the Senate.

16 (c) MISSION.—The Veterans Crisis Response Corps
17 shall—

18 (1) organize members of the Veterans Crisis
19 Response Corps to participate in disaster relief and
20 reconstruction projects following domestic or inter-
21 national manmade or natural disasters;

22 (2) in carrying out such projects, deploy mem-
23 bers of the Corps in support of the United States
24 Agency designated to lead the response to perform
25 reconstruction tasks and provide support services,

1 training, technical assistance, and other assistance
2 in post-disaster areas;

3 (3) supplement and enhance the humanitarian
4 relief and reconstruction support provided by other
5 departments and agencies of the Federal Govern-
6 ment, including the Department of Defense, the De-
7 partment of State, the United States Agency for
8 International Development, the Federal Emergency
9 Management Agency, and nongovernmental organi-
10 zations and international aid organizations, by de-
11 ploying a highly skilled and highly experienced work-
12 force of veterans; and

13 (4) identify high-impact reconstruction projects
14 in the United States that would make use of the
15 skills of members of the Veterans Crisis Response
16 Corps and leverage and coordinate with other ele-
17 ments of the Federal Government and nongovern-
18 mental organizations.

19 (d) POWERS.—The Director may establish general
20 policies of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps, including
21 with respect to—

22 (1) establishing rules for conducting the general
23 business of the Corps;

24 (2) entering into contracts;

1 (3) directing the establishment and mainte-
2 nance of divisions or other offices within the Corps;

3 (4) coordinating and overseeing the operation of
4 the activities of the Corps;

5 (5) adopting and using a seal;

6 (6) appointing and supervising personnel em-
7 ployed by the Corps;

8 (7) distributing business among such personnel
9 and units of the Corps;

10 (8) obligating and expending funds made avail-
11 able to the Corps; and

12 (9) performing such other functions as may be
13 authorized or required by law.

14 (e) PERSONNEL.—The Director may fix the number
15 of, and appoint and direct, employees of the Veterans Cri-
16 sis Response Corps, in accordance with the applicable pro-
17 visions of title 5, United States Code. Unless otherwise
18 provided expressly by law, any individual appointed under
19 this subsection shall be an employee as defined in section
20 2105 of title 5, United States Code, and subject to the
21 provisions of such title and other laws generally applicable
22 to the employees of an Executive agency.

23 **SEC. 4. MEMBERSHIP IN CORPS.**

24 (a) ELIGIBILITY.—

1 (1) VOLUNTEER.—Subject to paragraph (2), a
2 veteran may elect to serve as a member of the Vet-
3 erans Crisis Response Corps.

4 (2) REQUIREMENTS.—The Director may pre-
5 scribe requirements, including with respect to phys-
6 ical and mental health, for veterans to serve as
7 members of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps.

8 (b) DUTY REQUIRED.—

9 (1) TRAINING.—The Director shall require that
10 each member of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps
11 meet the training requirements pursuant to section
12 6.

13 (2) DEPLOYMENTS.—Members of the Veterans
14 Crisis Response Corps may elect to accept a deploy-
15 ment in support of a disaster relief or reconstruction
16 project pursuant to section 5. Such a deployment
17 may not exceed a one-year period. The Director may
18 not require that a member accept a deployment.

19 (3) LIST.—The Director shall maintain a list of
20 members of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps who
21 elect to accept deployments in support of a disaster
22 relief or reconstruction project pursuant to section 5.

23 (c) SEPARATION.—A member of the Veterans Crisis
24 Response Corps may be separated from the Corps as fol-
25 lows:

1 (1) Upon the election of the member.

2 (2) Upon the determination of the Director
3 that—

4 (A) the member has failed to meet the
5 training requirements pursuant to section 5 or
6 other requirements pursuant to this Act; or

7 (B) such separation is in the best interests
8 of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps.

9 **SEC. 5. DISASTER RELIEF AND RECONSTRUCTION PROJ-**
10 **ECTS.**

11 (a) PROJECT SELECTION.—In consultation with the
12 Coordination Council established under section 7, the Di-
13 rector shall select disaster relief and reconstruction
14 projects in the United States or outside the United States
15 for the Veterans Crisis Response Corps to carry out.

16 (b) INTERAGENCY PREFERENCE.—The Veterans Cri-
17 sis Response Corps shall be the preferred source of per-
18 sonnel for surge capacity to all United States Agencies
19 providing relief and reconstruction.

20 (c) PRIORITY.—To the extent practicable, the Direc-
21 tor shall prioritize the selection of disaster relief and re-
22 construction projects under subsection (a) that—

23 (1) will benefit from the skilled and experienced
24 labor of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps;

1 (2) support defined needs of the lead United
2 States Agency; and

3 (3) may be carried out using funds made avail-
4 able by an element of the Federal Government other
5 than the Veterans Crisis Response Corps, or by a
6 State or local government, a foreign country, or a
7 nongovernmental organization.

8 (d) TYPES OF PROJECTS.—Disaster relief and recon-
9 struction projects selected under subsection (a) shall in-
10 clude projects relating to—

11 (1) responding to natural disasters, including
12 through the provision of food, water, shelter, and
13 medical care;

14 (2) carrying out reconstruction following nat-
15 ural disasters, including repair of critical infrastruc-
16 ture;

17 (3) water and energy projects, including the
18 construction of water infrastructure, electrical infra-
19 structure and generation, and transportation hubs;
20 and

21 (4) other projects that the Director determines
22 fulfil the mission of the Veterans Crisis Response
23 Corps.

1 (e) AGREEMENTS.—The Director may enter into
2 agreements with nongovernmental organizations under
3 which—

4 (1) members of the Veterans Crisis Response
5 Corps assist the nongovernmental entity to carry out
6 disaster relief and reconstruction projects that the
7 Director determines fulfil the mission of the Vet-
8 erans Crisis Response Corps; and

9 (2) the Director may provide to the nongovern-
10 mental entity funds in amounts necessary to carry
11 out paragraph (1).

12 **SEC. 6. TRAINING OF MEMBERS OF THE VETERANS CRISIS**
13 **RESPONSE CORPS.**

14 (a) REQUIRED TRAINING.—The Director shall estab-
15 lish a system of required training for members of the Vet-
16 erans Crisis Response Corps that is carried out on a reg-
17 ular schedule.

18 (b) MANDATORY PARTICIPATION.—The Director
19 shall require members of the Veterans Crisis Response
20 Corps to participate in training under subsection (a) as
21 a condition of remaining eligible for deployment in support
22 of a disaster relief or reconstruction project pursuant to
23 section 5.

1 **SEC. 7. COMPENSATION, BENEFITS, AND PROTECTIONS**
2 **FOR MEMBERS OF THE VETERANS CRISIS RE-**
3 **SPONSE CORPS.**

4 (a) COMPENSATION.—The Director shall determine a
5 rate of compensation for members of the Veterans Crisis
6 Response Corps during a duty period. In determining such
7 rate, the Director shall take into account the final rank
8 in the Armed Forces of the members, the specific skills
9 possessed by members, and other factors as determined
10 appropriate by the Director.

11 (b) HEALTH CARE.—During a duty period, a mem-
12 ber of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps shall be treated
13 as a member of the National Guard on active duty for
14 a period of more than 30 days for purposes of being eligi-
15 ble for health care benefits under the TRICARE program
16 (as defined in section 1072 of title 10, United States
17 Code).

18 (c) EMPLOYMENT AND REEMPLOYMENT RIGHTS.—
19 Section 4303(16) of title 38, United States Code, is
20 amended by adding at the end the following new sentence:
21 “Such term also includes the Veterans Crisis Response
22 Corps when in a duty period (as defined in section 9 of
23 the Veterans Crisis Response Corps Act of 2018).”.

24 **SEC. 8. COORDINATION COUNCIL.**

25 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established a council
26 to be known as the “Coordination Council” to—

1 (1) advise the Director;

2 (2) assist the Director in identifying and
3 prioritizing disaster relief and reconstruction
4 projects under section 5 that are suitable to the mis-
5 sion and resources of the Veterans Crisis Response
6 Corps;

7 (3) coordinate the deployments of members of
8 the Veterans Crisis Response Corps in support of a
9 disaster relief or reconstruction project pursuant to
10 section 5; and

11 (4) as requested by the Director, provide tech-
12 nical support, training, logistical support, and other
13 appropriate support.

14 (b) MEMBERSHIP.—The Council shall consist of the
15 following:

16 (1) The Secretary of Defense.

17 (2) The Secretary of State.

18 (3) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

19 (4) The Secretary of the Department of Home-
20 land Security.

21 (5) The Administrator of the United States
22 Agency for International Development.

23 (6) The Administrator of the Federal Emer-
24 gency Management Agency.

1 (7) The Chief Executive Officer of the Corpora-
2 tion for National and Community Service.

3 (8) Other members in the non-voting, con-
4 sulting status as determined by the Council.

5 **SEC. 9. REPORTS.**

6 (a) REPORTS.—Not less than once each year, the Di-
7 rector shall submit to Congress a report on the operations
8 of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps.

9 (b) MATTERS INCLUDED.—Each report under sub-
10 section (a) shall include the following:

11 (1) A detail of any activities carried out by the
12 Veterans Crisis Response Corps during the period
13 covered by the report.

14 (2) Any recommendations the Director deter-
15 mines appropriate to increase the effectiveness and
16 efficiency of the Veterans Crisis Response Corps.

17 **SEC. 10. DEFINITIONS.**

18 In this Act:

19 (1) The term “duty period” means a period in
20 which a member of the Veterans Crisis Response
21 Corps is—

22 (A) deployed in support of a disaster relief
23 or reconstruction project pursuant to section 5;
24 or

1 (B) engaged in training pursuant to sec-
2 tion 6.

3 (2) The term “veteran” has the meaning given
4 that term in section 101(2) of title 38, United
5 States Code.

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