

115TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 6869

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 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 25, 2018

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ (for herself, Mr. COFFMAN, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. MEEKS, Mr. SERRANO, Mr. SEAN PATRICK MALONEY of New York, Mr. ENGEL, Mr. SUOZZI, Mrs. RADEWAGEN, Ms. JUDY CHU of California, Ms. ROYBAL-ALLARD, Mr. COHEN, Ms. WILSON of Florida, Mr. DESAULNIER, Mr. PAYNE, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. JONES, Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi, Ms. HANABUSA, Mr. KHANNA, Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, Ms. NORTON, Mr. SIRES, Mrs. TORRES, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mr. VELA, Ms. MCCOLLUM, Mr. TAKANO, Ms. MOORE, Ms. SPEIER, Ms. JAYAPAL, Ms. BROWNLEY of California, Mr. PALLONE, Ms. LOFGREN, Ms. SHEA-PORTER, Mrs. DINGELL, Ms. BORDALLO, Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mrs. DEMINGS, Ms. MICHELLE LUJAN GRISHAM of New Mexico, Mr. MCEACHIN, Mr. KILMER, Mr. MCNERNEY, Mrs. NAPOLITANO, Mr. SOTO, Mr. ESPAILLAT, Mr. CARBAJAL, Mr. SABLAN, Mrs. CAROLYN B. MALONEY of New York, Mr. RICHMOND, Mr. VARGAS, Ms. MATSUI, Mr. CARTWRIGHT, Ms. GABBARD, Mr. RASKIN, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Ms. KUSTER of New Hampshire, Mr. QUIGLEY, Ms. PINGREE, Mr. BISHOP of Georgia, Mr. JEFFRIES, Mr. TONKO, Mr. PANETTA, Mr. GUTIÉRREZ, Mr. MOULTON, Mr. CROWLEY, Ms. SÁNCHEZ, Mr. YARMUTH, Ms. ESTY of Connecticut, Ms. DELBENE, Mr. TED LIEU of California, Mr. BROWN of Maryland, Ms. MENG, Ms. ROSEN, Mr. RUPPERSBERGER, Mr. CARSON of Indiana, and Mr. CORREA) introduced the following bill; which was 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”.

6 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

7 The purpose of this Act is to better integrate the
8 medical, housing, mental health, and other benefits pro-
9 vided by the Department of Veterans Affairs with existing
10 community-based domestic violence and sexual assault
11 services—

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

15 (2) to better understand the impact of domestic
16 violence and sexual assault on veterans, particularly
17 female veterans.

18 **SEC. 3. PROGRAM TO ASSIST VETERANS WHO EXPERIENCE**
19 **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL ASSAULT.**

20 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
21 erans Affairs shall carry out a program to assist veterans
22 that have experienced or are experiencing domestic vio-

1 lence or sexual assault in accessing benefits from the De-
2 partment of Veterans Affairs, including coordinating ac-
3 cess to medical treatment centers, housing assistance, and
4 other benefits from the Department.

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

7 (1) domestic violence shelters and programs;
8 (2) rape crisis centers;
9 (3) State domestic violence and sexual assault
10 coalitions; and

11 (4) such other health care or other service pro-
12 viders that serve domestic violence or sexual assault
13 victims as determined by the Secretary, particularly
14 those providing emergency services or housing assist-
15 ance.

16 (c) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—In carrying out the
17 program under subsection (a), the Secretary may conduct
18 the following activities:

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

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

23 (B) coordinating with local service pro-
24 viders of the Department; and

1 (C) connecting veterans with appropriate
2 housing, mental health, medical, and other fi-
3 nancial assistance or benefits from the Depart-
4 ment.

5 (2) Assistance to service providers to ensure ac-
6 cess of veterans to domestic violence and sexual as-
7 sault emergency services, particularly in underserved
8 areas, including services for members of Indian
9 tribes.

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

13 (d) DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT
14 OUTREACH COORDINATORS.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—In order to effectively assist
16 veterans who have experienced domestic violence or
17 sexual assault, the Secretary may establish local co-
18 ordinators to provide outreach under the program
19 required by subsection (a).

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

23 (A) the dynamics of domestic violence and
24 sexual assault, including safety concerns, legal

1 protections, and the need for the provision of
2 confidential services;

3 (B) the eligibility of veterans for services
4 and benefits from the Department that are rel-
5 evant to recovery from domestic violence and
6 sexual assault, particularly emergency housing
7 assistance, mental health care, other health
8 care, and disability benefits; and

9 (C) local community resources addressing
10 domestic violence and sexual assault.

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

15 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON VETERANS EXPERI-**
16 **ENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL AS-**
17 **SAULT.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
19 fairs, in consultation with the Attorney General and the
20 Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall establish
21 a national task force (in this section referred to as the
22 “Task Force”) to develop a comprehensive national pro-
23 gram, including by integrating facilities, services, and ben-
24 efits of the Department of Veterans Affairs into existing
25 networks of community-based domestic violence and sex-

1 ual assault services, to address domestic violence and sex-
2 ual assault among veterans.

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

5 (1) representatives from not fewer than three
6 national organizations or State coalitions with dem-
7 onstrated expertise in domestic violence prevention,
8 response, or advocacy; and

9 (2) representatives from not fewer than three
10 national organizations or State coalitions, particu-
11 larly those representing underserved or ethnic mi-
12 nority communities, with demonstrated expertise in
13 sexual assault prevention, response, or advocacy.

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

16 (1) To review existing services and policies of
17 the Department and develop a comprehensive na-
18 tional program to address domestic violence and sex-
19 ual assault prevention, response, and treatment.

20 (2) To review the feasibility and advisability of
21 establishing an expedited process to secure emer-
22 gency, temporary benefits, including housing or
23 other benefits, for veterans who are experiencing do-
24 mestic violence or sexual assault.

1 (3) To review and make recommendations re-
2 garding the feasibility and advisability of estab-
3 lishing dedicated, temporary housing assistance for
4 veterans experiencing domestic violence or sexual as-
5 sault.

6 (4) To identify any requirements regarding do-
7 mestic violence assistance or sexual assault response
8 and services that are not being met by the Depart-
9 ment and make recommendations on how the De-
10 partment can meet such requirements.

11 (5) To review and make recommendations re-
12 garding the feasibility and advisability of providing
13 direct services or contracting for community-based
14 services for veterans in response to a sexual assault,
15 including through the use of sexual assault nurse ex-
16 aminers, particularly in underserved or remote
17 areas, including services for members of Indian
18 tribes.

19 (6) To review the availability of counseling serv-
20 ices provided by the Department and through peer
21 network support, and to provide recommendations
22 for the enhancement of such services, to address—

23 (A) the perpetration of domestic violence
24 and sexual assault; and

1 (B) the recovery of veterans, particularly
2 female veterans, from domestic violence and
3 sexual assault.

4 (7) To review and make recommendations to
5 expand services available for veterans at risk of per-
6 petrating domestic violence.

7 (d) REPORT.—Not later than one year after the date
8 of the enactment of this Act, and not less frequently than
9 annually thereafter, the Task Force shall submit to the
10 Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Congress a report on
11 the activities of the Task Force, including any rec-
12 ommendations for legislative or administrative action.

13 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL BASELINE STUDY ON PROBLEM OF DO-**
14 **MESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT**
15 **AMONG VETERANS AND SPOUSES OF VET-**
16 **ERANS.**

17 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation
18 with the Attorney General, shall conduct a national base-
19 line study to examine the scope of the problem of domestic
20 violence and sexual assault among veterans and spouses
21 of veterans.

○