

As a result, the Peltz family was left to shoulder the financial burden of his father's care on their own, compounding grief with stress, uncertainty, and frustration. In short, the Peltz family was penalized for the VA's mistakes. This is unacceptable.

This is why I have been working for over 2 years to pass the Ernest Peltz Accrued Veterans Benefits Act. We have worked closely with the Peltz family, veterans service organizations, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, including the lead Democrat sponsor, Congressman RO KHANNA, to craft this legislation to correct this moral wrong.

This bill eliminates the burden on a veteran's surviving family by ensuring that the veteran is entitled to receive their pre-approved pension benefits within the month that death occurs.

□ 1710

I represent New York's 21st Congressional District, representing the largest number of veterans in any district in New York State. That is why I am proud to take action to make sure no family mourning the loss of a loved one who is a veteran has to deal with VA red tape and these bureaucratic mistakes.

This commonsense, bipartisan legislation honors the legacy of World War II Veteran Ernest Peltz and takes a critical step toward improving the VA's effectiveness and accountability.

What was amazing about this process, while mourning the loss of their father, Charles Peltz shared with me his priority was making sure that this never happened to another family again. That is why we are working to pass this bill today.

I thank Charles Peltz for his work with my office and with me directly. I am grateful for the bipartisan support, and I urge a "yes" to pass it on the floor.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time for closing.

I encourage my fellow colleagues to vote "yes" on H.R. 3123, the Ernest Peltz Accrued Veterans Benefits Act, as amended, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, once again, I encourage all Members to support this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3123, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A PERSON AS A MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST, QUALIFIED TO PROVIDE CLINICAL SUPERVISION, IN THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION**

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 658) to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish qualifications for the appointment of a person as a marriage and family therapist, qualified to provide clinical supervision, in the Veterans Health Administration, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 658

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

**SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT OF QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF A PERSON AS A MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST, QUALIFIED TO PROVIDE CLINICAL SUPERVISION, IN THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION.**

Section 7402(b)(10) of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) by redesignating subparagraphs (A) and (B) as clauses (i) and (ii), respectively;

(2) by inserting "(A)" before "To be eligible"; and

(3) by adding at the end the following new subparagraph (B):

"(B) To be eligible to be appointed to a marriage and family therapist position and qualified to provide clinical supervision, a person must—

"(i) have the qualifications set forth in subparagraph (A); and

"(ii) be recognized by the State described in clause (ii) of such subparagraph as a provider of, or otherwise allowed by such State to provide, clinical supervision."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) and the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois.

**GENERAL LEAVE**

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks on H.R. 658, as amended.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 658, as amended. This bill was introduced by my colleague Representative JULIA BROWNLEY of California.

Under current law, only one accrediting body has power over who can work as a marriage and family therapist in supervisory roles at the VHA. This is an unnecessary burden. It unnecessarily restricts access to licensed marriage and family therapists who can help veterans grow and maintain healthy familial relationships.

With Representative BROWNLEY's bill, the law would include more eligible licensors to ensure a sufficient pipeline of therapists are able to work at VA and help our Nation's veterans, if they need it.

Madam Speaker, I thank Representative BROWNLEY for her bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 658, legislation introduced by my colleague Representative JULIA BROWNLEY of California. This legislation would establish qualifications for the appointment of marriage and family therapists to provide clinical supervision in the Veterans Health Administration.

Licensed marriage and family therapists provide critical therapy and support to address the unique challenges that military veterans and their families face.

Veterans and their families are no strangers to facing life challenges when transitioning from Active Duty, whether that is adjusting to life as a civilian, navigating new family dynamics, or even dealing with medical needs or big moves.

Licensed marriage and family therapists help individuals and couples develop coping strategies and mechanisms to face these challenges head-on, and help ensure those who serve our Nation have the resources they need to support themselves and their families.

Licensed marriage and family therapists have provided care to countless veterans since 2010 when VA first established qualification standards for the profession and began hiring licensed marriage and family therapists.

However, in 2018, the VA amended its qualification standards and created a new requirement that licensed marriage and family therapists who want to serve as supervisors or managers must obtain the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy's "approved supervisor" designation.

Currently, the VA does not require licensed professional mental health counselors, social workers, or other mental health providers to obtain a designation from a private organization in order to serve as clinical supervisors.

Additionally, the VA's current qualification standards are not in alignment with State law. All 50 States and the District of Columbia license or certify licensed marriage and family therapists and have requirements for individuals who want to provide clinical supervision. However, only two States, North Carolina and Tennessee, require that clinical supervisors hold a private association's "approved supervisor" designation.

The VA's current qualification standards place licensed marriage and family therapists at a disadvantage when it comes to retention and promotion. There are thousands of licensed marriage and family therapists who are

recognized as State-approved supervisors, yet they are not eligible to supervise within the VA because they do not have the "approved supervisor" designation. Some licensed family and marriage therapists have left VA employment because of this restriction which contributes to vacancies among mental health providers within the Department.

H.R. 658 would help expand veterans' access to mental health care by expanding the pool of eligible licensed marriage and family therapist applicants for both rank and file and supervisory positions.

We must ensure that dedicated mental health professionals are able to fully support our veterans. That is why I support this legislation, and I encourage my colleagues to do the same. I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. BROWNLEY), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Health and the author of this legislation.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman and ranking member for bringing my bill forward today.

I rise in support of the bill titled: Establishment of Qualifications for the Appointment of a Person as a Marriage and Family Therapist, Qualified to Provide Clinical Supervision, in the Veterans Health Administration, legislation I have authored, because of the very real stories I have heard from veterans, from their families, and from therapists, not only in my district but across our great country.

Ventura County has a long and proud military history. We are home to Naval Base Ventura County, and more than 40,000 veterans call our community home.

Every day, I see the strength, the resilience, and sacrifice of these families. I also see the challenges they face when their service ends and their transition back to civilian life begins. That transition is not only difficult for many servicemembers. It affects their spouses. It affects their children, and it affects entire families.

□ 1720

Many of these families, rightly so, turn to therapy and counseling for support as they navigate major life changes, trauma, and the stress that can follow after years of service.

Licensed marriage and family therapists are often the professionals helping these veterans and their families. They help couples work through their challenges. They help parents and children communicate. They help veterans develop healthy coping mechanisms and rebuild stability at home.

However, the VA's current promotion rules are discouraging many of these highly trained and qualified therapists from working at VA facilities throughout the country. While VA hires mar-

riage and family therapists who are accredited through different organizations, under current VA regulations, only therapists who graduated from the one specific accreditation pathway are eligible to be promoted into supervisory roles at VA. This is despite the fact that, nationwide, nearly 30 percent of licensed marriage and family therapists did not graduate from that specific accreditation program. In States like New York, Florida, and Ohio, that number is closer to 40 percent. In my home State of California, 95 percent of licensed marriage and family therapists hold licenses from other programs.

Let's be clear: All of these marriage and family therapists are fully licensed in their States where they practice and are fully qualified professionals. Their accreditations are also already recognized by private insurance, TRICARE, and some State Medicaid programs.

However, inside the VA system, they hit a career ceiling, which they cannot fix because this credential cannot be obtained retroactively. What happens? They leave, or they never come to the VA in the first place, and veterans and their families lose access to care or lose the therapists that they have trusted.

I have heard directly from therapists who want to serve veterans but feel pushed away by this outdated rule. I have heard from so many veterans who want to keep their therapist who has helped them and their family through some of the hardest moments of their lives.

This bill is about fixing that. It is about recognizing that these therapists are qualified, capable, and already doing life-changing work for veterans and their families. It is about removing an unnecessary bureaucratic barrier that is shrinking the pool of providers and supervisors at a time when demand for mental health services has never been greater.

More importantly, this bill is about upholding our promise to care for veterans after their service, not just with words, but with access to support their families' needs to stay strong and healthy.

This legislation passed the Veterans' Affairs Committee with strong, bipartisan support.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bill today and support our Nation's veterans and their families who depend on this care.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in passing H.R. 658, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I encourage everyone to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. BOST) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 658, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the

rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

## VETERANS EDUCATION AND TECHNICAL SKILLS OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2025

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1458) to amend title 38, United States Code, to modify the criteria for approval of certain independent study programs for purposes of the educational assistance programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1458

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans Education and Technical Skills Opportunity Act of 2025" or the "VETS Opportunity Act of 2025".

### SEC. 2. REPAYMENT OF MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARDS POST-9/11 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE: TIMING; MECHANISM FOR INDIVIDUALS NOT ELIGIBLE FOR A MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Subsection (f) of section 3327 of title 38, United States Code, is amended—

(1) in paragraph (3), by striking "together" and all that follows through "before" and inserting "not later than 60 days after"; and

(2) by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(4) ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR AN INDIVIDUAL NOT ELIGIBLE FOR A MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND.—In the case of an individual making an election under subsection (a) who is described by subparagraph (A), (C), or (E) of paragraph (1) of that subsection, and who is not eligible for a monthly stipend payable under section 3313(c) of this title, the educational assistance payable to the individual under this chapter shall be paid—

"(A) in a lump sum calculated by multiplying—

"(i) the total amount of contributions described in paragraph (1)(A) with regards to such individual; and

"(ii) the sum of the number of months described in subclauses (I) and (II) of paragraph (1)(B)(i) with regards to such individual; and

"(B) to the individual not later than 60 days after the exhaustion of the individual's entitlement to educational assistance under this chapter."

(b) TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS AND CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Such subsection is further amended—

(1) by striking "paragraphs (2) through (7)" and inserting "paragraphs (2) through (6)"; and

(2) in paragraph (1), in the heading, by inserting "FOR AN INDIVIDUAL ELIGIBLE FOR A MONTHLY HOUSING STIPEND" after "ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE".

(c) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made by this section shall take effect on August 1, 2026.

### SEC. 3. TREATMENT OF CERTAIN INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAMS UNDER EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 3680A(a)(4)(A)(ii)(III) of such title is amended—