

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1399

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating Veteran Student Centers.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 17, 2015

Ms. FRANKEL of Florida (for herself, Mr. BILIRAKIS, and Mr. TAKANO) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and the Workforce

A BILL

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating Veteran Student Centers.

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 “Veteran Education
5 Empowerment Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Over 1,000,000 veterans attended institu-
9 tions of higher education in 2014.

1 (2) Veterans face unique challenges in
2 transitioning from the battlefield to the classroom
3 and eventually to the workforce, often including: age
4 differences, family obligations, significant time away
5 from academic life, and service-related disabilities.

6 (3) The National Endowment for the Human-
7 ities' Warrior-Scholar Project found that "veterans
8 transitioning to college likely have not used academic
9 skills since high school and have difficulty adjusting
10 to a fundamentally different social and cultural envi-
11 ronment, [leading] to veterans dropping out of col-
12 lege before earning their degree".

13 (4) The National Education Association found
14 that veteran students can feel lonely and vulnerable
15 on campus and that "connecting student veterans
16 can effectively ease this isolation" by bringing to-
17 gether new veteran students with those who have al-
18 ready successfully navigated the first few semesters
19 of college.

20 (5) The unemployment rate for post-9/11 vet-
21 erans far outpaces both the overall non-veteran un-
22 employment rate and the unemployment rate for
23 non-veterans entering the workforce for the first
24 time.

1 (6) According to Mission United—a United
2 Way program that helps veterans re-acclimate to ci-
3 vilian life—it is often “essential” for veteran stu-
4 dents to be mentored by “another veteran who un-
5 derstands their mindset and experience”.

6 (7) Veteran Student Centers are recognized as
7 an institutional best practice by Student Veterans of
8 America.

9 (8) The American Council on Education, which
10 represents more than 1,700 institutions of higher
11 education across the country, has called having a
12 dedicated space for veterans on campus “a prom-
13 ising way for colleges and universities to better serve
14 veterans on campus” and a “critical” component of
15 many colleges’ efforts to serve their veteran stu-
16 dents.

17 (9) The Department of Education included as
18 one of its 8 Keys to Veterans’ Success that colleges
19 and universities should “coordinate and centralize
20 campus efforts for all veterans, together with the
21 creation of a designated space for them”.

22 (10) Budget constraints often make it difficult
23 or impossible for institutions of higher education to
24 dedicate space to veteran offices, lounges, or student
25 centers.

1 (11) The 110th Congress authorized the fund-
2 ing of Veteran Student Centers through the Centers
3 of Excellence for Veteran Student Success under
4 part T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of
5 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t). Congress also chose to ap-
6 propriate funding for this program for fiscal year
7 2015 under the Consolidated and Further Con-
8 tinuing Appropriations Act, 2015 (Public Law 113–
9 235).

10 (12) According to the Department of Edu-
11 cation, federally funded Veteran Student Centers
12 and staff have generated improved recruitment, re-
13 tention, and graduation rates, have helped veteran
14 students feel better connected across campus, and
15 have directly contributed to student veterans’ suc-
16 cessful academic outcomes.

17 **SEC. 3. GRANT PROGRAM TO ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND**
18 **IMPROVE VETERAN STUDENT CENTERS.**

19 Title VIII of the Higher Education Act of 1965 is
20 amended by striking part T (20 U.S.C. 1161t) and insert-
21 ing the following:

1 serving on active duty, and members of a
2 reserve component of the Armed Forces; or
3 “(ii) a significant percentage of vet-
4 eran students,
5 as measured by comparing the overall enrollment of
6 the institution or consortium to the number, for the
7 most recent academic year for which data are avail-
8 able, of veteran students, members of the Armed
9 Forces serving on active duty, and members of a re-
10 serve component of the Armed Forces who are en-
11 rolled in undergraduate or graduate courses at the
12 institution or consortium.

13 “(B) The institution or consortium pre-
14 sents a sustainability plan to demonstrate that
15 its Veteran Student Center will be maintained
16 and will continue to operate after the grant pe-
17 riod of the grant received under subsection (a)
18 has ended.

19 “(3) ADDITIONAL CRITERIA.—In awarding
20 grants under subsection (a), the Secretary—

21 “(A) shall consider institutions or con-
22 sortia representing a broad spectrum of sectors
23 and sizes, including institutions or consortia
24 from urban, suburban, and rural regions of the
25 United States; and

1 “(B) may provide consideration to institu-
2 tions or consortia that meet one or more of the
3 following criteria:

4 “(i) The institution or consortium is
5 located in a region or community that has
6 a significant population of veterans.

7 “(ii) The institution or consortium
8 carries out programs or activities that as-
9 sist veterans in the local community and
10 the spouses of veteran students.

11 “(iii) The institution or consortium
12 partners in its veteran-specific program-
13 ming with non-profit veteran service orga-
14 nizations, local workforce development or-
15 ganizations, or institutions of higher edu-
16 cation.

17 “(iv) The institution or consortium
18 commits to hiring a staff at the Veteran
19 Student Center that includes veterans (in-
20 cluding veteran student volunteers and vet-
21 eran students participating in a Federal
22 work-study program under part C of title
23 IV, a work-study program administered by
24 the Secretary of Veteran Affairs, or a
25 State work-study program).

1 “(v) The institution or consortium
2 commits to using a portion of the grant re-
3 ceived under this section to develop an
4 early-warning veteran student retention
5 program carried out by the Veteran Stu-
6 dent Center.

7 “(vi) The institution or consortium
8 commits to providing mental health coun-
9 seling to its veteran students and their
10 spouses.

11 “(c) USE OF FUNDS.—

12 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An institution or consor-
13 tium that is awarded a grant under subsection (a)
14 shall use such grant to establish, maintain, improve,
15 or operate a Veteran Student Center.

16 “(2) OTHER ALLOWABLE USES.—An institution
17 or consortium receiving a grant under subsection (a)
18 may use a portion of such funds to carry out sup-
19 portive instruction services for student veterans, in-
20 cluding—

21 “(A) assistance with special admissions
22 and transfer of credit from previous postsec-
23 ondary education or experience; and

24 “(B) any other support services the insti-
25 tution or consortium determines to be necessary

1 to ensure the success of veterans on campus in
2 achieving education and career goals.

3 “(d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

4 “(1) DURATION.—Each grant awarded under
5 subsection (a) shall be for a 4-year period.

6 “(2) TOTAL AMOUNT OF GRANT AND SCHED-
7 ULE.—Each grant awarded under subsection (a)
8 may not exceed a total of \$500,000. The Secretary
9 shall disburse to an institution or consortium the
10 amounts awarded under the grant in such amounts
11 and at such times during the grant period as the
12 Secretary determines appropriate.

13 “(e) REPORT.—From the amounts appropriated to
14 carry out this section, and not later than 3 years after
15 the date on which the first grant is awarded under sub-
16 section (a), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a re-
17 port on the grant program established under subsection
18 (a), including—

19 “(1) the number of grants awarded;

20 “(2) the institutions of higher education and
21 consortia that have received grants;

22 “(3) with respect to each such institution of
23 higher education and consortium—

24 “(A) the amounts awarded;

1 “(B) how such institution or consortium
2 used such amounts;

3 “(C) a description of the students to whom
4 services were offered as a result of the award;
5 and

6 “(D) data enumerating whether the use of
7 the amounts awarded helped veteran students
8 at the institution or consortium toward comple-
9 tion of a degree, certificate, or credential;

10 “(4) best practices for veteran student success,
11 identified by reviewing data provided by institutions
12 and consortia that received a grant under this sec-
13 tion; and

14 “(5) a determination by the Secretary with re-
15 spect to whether the grant program under this sec-
16 tion should be extended or expanded.

17 “(f) TERMINATION.—The authority of the Secretary
18 to carry out the grant program established under sub-
19 section (a) shall terminate on the date that is 4 years after
20 the date on which the first grant is awarded under sub-
21 section (a).

22 “(g) DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES
23 WEBSITE.—Subject to the availability of appropriations
24 under subsection (i) and not later than 3 years after the
25 date on which the first grant is awarded under subsection

1 (a), the Secretary shall develop and implement a website
2 for veteran student services at institutions of higher edu-
3 cation, which details best practices for serving veteran stu-
4 dents at institutions of higher education.

5 “(h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

6 “(1) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—
7 The term ‘institution of higher education’ has the
8 meaning given the term in section 101.

9 “(2) VETERAN STUDENT CENTER.—The term
10 ‘Veteran Student Center’ means a dedicated space
11 on a campus of an institution of higher education
12 that provides students who are veterans or members
13 of the Armed Forces with the following:

14 “(A) A lounge or meeting space for such
15 veteran students, their spouses or partners, and
16 veterans in the community.

17 “(B) A centralized office for veteran serv-
18 ices that—

19 “(i) is a single point of contact to co-
20 ordinate comprehensive support services
21 for veteran students;

22 “(ii) is staffed by trained employees
23 and volunteers, which includes veterans
24 and at least one full-time employee or vol-

1 unteer who is trained as a veterans’ bene-
2 fits counselor;

3 “ (iii) provides veteran students with
4 assistance relating to—

5 “ (I) transitioning from the mili-
6 tary to student life;

7 “ (II) transitioning from the mili-
8 tary to the civilian workforce;

9 “ (III) networking with other vet-
10 eran students and veterans in the
11 community;

12 “ (IV) understanding and obtain-
13 ing benefits provided by the institu-
14 tion of higher education, Federal Gov-
15 ernment, and State for which such
16 students may be eligible;

17 “ (V) understanding how to suc-
18 ceed in the institution of higher edu-
19 cation, including by understanding
20 academic policies, the course selection
21 process, and institutional policies and
22 practices related to the transfer of
23 academic credits; and

24 “ (VI) understanding their dis-
25 ability-related rights and protections

1 under the Americans with Disabilities
2 Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.)
3 and section 504 of the Rehabilitation
4 Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794) ; and
5 “(iv) provides comprehensive academic
6 and tutoring services for veteran students,
7 including peer-to-peer tutoring and aca-
8 demic mentorship.

9 “(i) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
10 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part
11 such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2016 and
12 each of the 3 succeeding fiscal years.”.

13 **SEC. 4. CONTINUATION OF AWARDS.**

14 An institution of higher education that received a
15 grant under section 873 of the Higher Education Act of
16 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t) before the date of enactment of
17 this Act, as such section 873 (20 U.S.C. 1161t) was in
18 effect on the day before the date of enactment of this Act,
19 shall continue to receive funds in accordance with the
20 terms and conditions of such grant.

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