

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2386

To amend the VA MISSION Act of 2018, to expand the peer specialist support program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to all medical centers of the Department, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JULY 20, 2021

Mr. BLUMENTHAL (for himself and Mr. BLUNT) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend the VA MISSION Act of 2018, to expand the peer specialist support program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to all medical centers of the Department, 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 “Veteran Peer Specialist
5 Act of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF PEER SPECIALIST SUPPORT PRO-**
 2 **GRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
 3 **FAIRS.**

4 (a) EXPANSION.—Section 506 of the VA MISSION
 5 Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note)
 6 is amended—

7 (1) by redesignating subsections (d) through (f)
 8 as subsections (e) through (g);

9 (2) in subsection (b), in the subsection heading,
 10 by striking “TIMEFRAME” and inserting “INITIAL
 11 TIMEFRAME”;

12 (3) in subsection (c)—

13 (A) in the subsection heading, by striking
 14 “SELECTION” and inserting “INITIAL SELEC-
 15 TION”; and

16 (B) in paragraph (1), in the matter pre-
 17 ceding subparagraph (A), by striking “The Sec-
 18 retary shall” and inserting “In establishing the
 19 program at initial locations, the Secretary
 20 shall”;

21 (4) by inserting after subsection (c) the fol-
 22 lowing new subsection:

23 “(d) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION OF PROGRAM; SE-
 24 LECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

25 “(1) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION.—The Sec-
 26 retary shall make permanent and expand the pro-

1 gram to additional medical centers of the Depart-
2 ment as follows:

3 “(A) As of the date of the enactment of
4 the Veteran Peer Specialist Act of 2021, at
5 each medical center participating in the pro-
6 gram on the day before such date of enactment.

7 “(B) During the five-year period following
8 such date of enactment, at an additional 25
9 medical centers per year until the program is
10 carried out at each medical center of the De-
11 partment.

12 “(2) SELECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

13 In selecting medical centers for the expansion of the
14 program under paragraph (1)(B), until such time as
15 each medical center of the Department is partici-
16 pating in the program by establishing not fewer than
17 two peer specialists at the medical center, the Sec-
18 retary shall prioritize medical centers in the fol-
19 lowing areas:

20 “(A) Rural areas and other areas that are
21 underserved by the Department.

22 “(B) Areas that are not in close proximity
23 to an active duty military installation.

1 “(C) Areas representing different geo-
 2 graphic locations, such as census tracts estab-
 3 lished by the Bureau of the Census.”;

4 (5) in subsection (e), as redesignated by para-
 5 graph (1)—

6 (A) in the subsection heading, by striking
 7 “GENDER-SPECIFIC SERVICES” and inserting
 8 “CONSIDERATIONS FOR HIRING PEER SPE-
 9 CIALISTS”;

10 (B) in the matter preceding paragraph (1),
 11 by striking “location selected under subsection
 12 (c)” and inserting “medical center”; and

13 (C) by striking paragraph (2) and insert-
 14 ing the following new paragraphs:

15 “(2) female peer specialists are hired and made
 16 available to support female veterans who are treated
 17 at each medical center; and

18 “(3) to the extent practical, peer specialists are
 19 hired in demographic percentages that reflect the ra-
 20 cial and ethnic demographic percentages of the over-
 21 all veteran population.”; and

22 (6) by amending subsection (g), as redesignated
 23 by paragraph (1), to read as follows:

24 “(g) REPORTS.—

25 “(1) PERIODIC REPORTS.—

1 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one
2 year after the date of the enactment of the Vet-
3 eran Peer Specialist Act of 2021, and annually
4 thereafter for five years, the Secretary shall
5 submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
6 of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans’
7 Affairs of the House of Representatives a re-
8 port on the program, including the expansion of
9 the program under subsection (d)(1).

10 “(B) ELEMENTS.—Each report under sub-
11 paragraph (A) shall include, with respect to the
12 one-year period preceding the submission of the
13 report, the following:

14 “(i) The findings and conclusions of
15 the Secretary with respect to the program.

16 “(ii) An assessment of the benefits of
17 the program to veterans and family mem-
18 bers of veterans.

19 “(iii) An assessment of the effective-
20 ness of peer specialists in engaging under
21 subsection (f) with health care providers in
22 the community and veterans served by
23 such providers.

1 “(iv) The name and location of each
2 medical center where new peer specialists
3 were hired.

4 “(v) The number of new peer special-
5 ists hired at each medical center pursuant
6 to this section and the total number of
7 peer specialists within the Department
8 hired pursuant to this section.

9 “(vi) An assessment of any barriers
10 confronting the recruitment, training, or
11 retention of peer specialists.

12 “(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than one year
13 after the Secretary determines that the program is
14 being carried out at each medical center of the De-
15 partment, the Secretary shall submit to the Com-
16 mittee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and the
17 Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of
18 Representatives a report notifying such committees
19 of that determination.”.

20 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
21 authorized to be appropriated to carry out the amend-
22 ments made by this section \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal
23 years 2022 through 2027.

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