

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3323

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements to the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

DECEMBER 7, 2021

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

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make certain improvements to the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, 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 Justice Out-
5 reach Improvement Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENTS TO VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH**
7 **PROGRAM.**

8 (a) **OUTREACH REQUIREMENT.**—The Secretary of
9 Veterans Affairs shall conduct outreach regarding the Vet-
10 erans Justice Outreach Program to justice-involved vet-

1 erans, military and veterans service organizations, and rel-
2 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice community, in-
3 cluding officials from local law enforcement, court, and jail
4 systems and others as determined appropriate by the Sec-
5 retary. Such outreach—

6 (1) shall be designed—

7 (A) to spread awareness and under-
8 standing of the Program;

9 (B) to spread awareness and under-
10 standing of veteran eligibility for the Program,
11 including the eligibility of veterans who were
12 discharged from service in the Armed Forces
13 under conditions other than honorable; and

14 (C) to improve the identification of justice-
15 involved veterans; and

16 (2) may be conducted in person, virtually, or
17 through other means, including by the dissemination
18 of informational materials and contact information.

19 (b) STRATEGIC PLAN.—The Secretary of Veterans
20 Affairs shall develop a strategic plan for the Veterans Jus-
21 tice Outreach Program. In developing such plan, the Sec-
22 retary shall conduct—

23 (1) an assessment of barriers to working with
24 justice-involved veterans in rural, remote, and under-

1 served areas, including potential steps to address
 2 such barriers; and

3 (2) a workforce gap analysis for the Program.

4 (c) INCREASE IN NUMBER OF VJO SPECIALISTS.—

5 (1) INCREASE.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
 6 fairs shall increase the number of Veterans Justice
 7 Outreach specialists responsible for supporting jus-
 8 tice-involved veterans in rural, remote, or under-
 9 served areas, including areas located far from De-
 10 partment of Veterans Affairs medical centers, as de-
 11 termined by the Secretary, through—

12 (A) the hiring of additional Veterans Jus-
 13 tice Outreach specialists;

14 (B) the reallocation of existing Veterans
 15 Justice Outreach specialists; or

16 (C) such other means as may be deter-
 17 mined appropriate by the Secretary.

18 (2) DETERMINATION.—The Secretary shall de-
 19 termine the number of Veterans Justice Outreach
 20 specialists required, and the locations of such spe-
 21 cialists, under paragraph (1) by taking into ac-
 22 count—

23 (A) such number and locations needed to
 24 achieve the mission and strategic goals of the
 25 Veterans Justice Outreach Program;

1 (B) any gaps in the workforce of the Pro-
 2 gram, including such gaps identified pursuant
 3 to subsection (b)(2); and

4 (C) strategies to address such gaps.

5 (3) USE OF TECHNOLOGY.—In carrying out
 6 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall consider the use
 7 of virtual technology.

8 (d) PERFORMANCE GOALS AND IMPLEMENTATION
 9 PLANS.—

10 (1) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of Vet-
 11 erans Affairs shall establish performance goals and
 12 implementation plans for—

13 (A) the Veterans Justice Outreach Pro-
 14 gram;

15 (B) Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists;
 16 and

17 (C) providing support for research regard-
 18 ing justice-involved veterans.

19 (2) CONSISTENCY WITH STRATEGIC PLAN.—
 20 The Secretary shall ensure that the performance
 21 goals and implementation plans under paragraph (1)
 22 are consistent with the strategic plan under sub-
 23 section (b) and include—

24 (A) qualitative and quantitative milestones,
 25 measures, and metrics, and associated timelines

1 for completion of the plans under paragraph (1)
2 and barriers to such completion;

3 (B) an identification of relevant staff; and

4 (C) an estimate of resource needs and
5 sources.

6 (3) PERFORMANCE DATA.—The Secretary shall
7 establish a process to regularly collect and analyze
8 performance data to assess the efficiency and effec-
9 tiveness of implementing the plans under paragraph
10 (1).

11 (e) TRAINING REQUIREMENT.—The Secretary shall
12 ensure that all Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists re-
13 ceive training not less frequently than annually on—

14 (1) best practices for identifying and con-
15 ducting outreach to justice-involved veterans and rel-
16 evant stakeholders in the criminal justice commu-
17 nity; and

18 (2) veteran eligibility for the Veterans Justice
19 Outreach Program, including with respect to consist-
20 ently communicating changes regarding eligibility
21 (including through the use of a script or other ref-
22 erence materials).

23 (f) REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION.—

24 (1) FIRST REPORT.—Not later than one year
25 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-

1 retary shall submit to Congress a report on the fol-
2 lowing:

3 (A) An assessment of implementing sub-
4 section (c), including—

5 (i) strategies to increase Veterans
6 Justice Outreach specialists responsible for
7 supporting justice-involved veterans in
8 rural, remote, or underserved areas; and

9 (ii) the progress of the Secretary in
10 addressing gaps in the workforce of the
11 Veterans Justice Outreach Program identi-
12 fied pursuant to paragraph (2) of such
13 subsection.

14 (B) The performance goals and implemen-
15 tation plans established under subsection
16 (d)(1).

17 (2) SUBSEQUENT REPORT.—Not later than
18 three years after the date on which the first report
19 is submitted under paragraph (1), the Secretary
20 shall submit to Congress a report on the progress of
21 the Secretary in meeting the performance goals and
22 carrying out activities under the implementation
23 plans established under subsection (d)(1).

24 (g) REPORT ON VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS.—
25 Not later than one year after the date of the enactment

1 of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation with the Attor-
 2 ney General, shall submit to Congress a report on the en-
 3 gagement of the Department of Veterans Affairs with vet-
 4 erans treatment courts, including—

5 (1) the availability and efficacy of veterans
 6 treatment courts in meeting the needs of justice-in-
 7 volved veterans;

8 (2) best practices for Department of Veterans
 9 Affairs staff and justice-involved veterans in working
 10 with veterans treatment courts; and

11 (3) the ability of justice-involved veterans to ac-
 12 cess veterans treatment courts, including any bar-
 13 riers that exist to increasing such access.

14 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

15 (1) JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERAN.—The term
 16 “justice-involved veteran” means a veteran with ac-
 17 tive, ongoing, or recent contact with some compo-
 18 nent of a local criminal justice system.

19 (2) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH PRO-
 20 GRAM.—The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Pro-
 21 gram” means the program through which the De-
 22 partment of Veterans Affairs identifies justice-in-
 23 volved veterans and provides such veterans with ac-
 24 cess to Department services.

1 (3) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH SPE-
2 CIALIST.—The term “Veterans Justice Outreach
3 Specialist” means an employee of the Department of
4 Veterans Affairs who serves as a liaison between the
5 Department and the local criminal justice system on
6 behalf of a justice-involved veteran.

7 (4) VETERANS TREATMENT COURT.—The term
8 “veterans treatment court” means a State or local
9 court that is participating in the veterans treatment
10 court program (as defined in section 2991(i)(1) of
11 the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of
12 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3797aa(i)(1))).

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