

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4493

To improve cybersecurity practices and improve digital literacy among veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 23, 2022

Ms. KLOBUCHAR (for herself and Mr. BENNET) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To improve cybersecurity practices and improve digital literacy among veterans, 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 Online Infor-
5 mation and Cybersecurity Empowerment Act of 2022” or
6 the “VOICE Act of 2022”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

8 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

9 (1) Researchers have documented persistent,
10 pervasive, and coordinated online targeting of mem-

1 bers of the Armed Forces, veterans, and their fami-
2 lies by foreign adversaries seeking to undermine
3 United States democracy in part because of public
4 trust placed in these communities. Government
5 agencies and researchers have also documented the
6 targeting of veterans by fraudsters, especially online
7 scammers, seeking to steal their government bene-
8 fits.

9 (2) According to the Federal Trade Commis-
10 sion, fraud costs veterans, members of the Armed
11 Forces, and their families \$267,000,000 in 2021.
12 This was a 162-percent increase from 2020 and the
13 median loss for these scam victims was \$600, 20
14 percent higher than for the median loss for the gen-
15 eral public. According to a 2017 survey conducted
16 by the American Association of Retired Persons
17 (AARP) veterans are twice as likely to unknowingly
18 participate in a scam compared to the general popu-
19 lation and an estimated 16 percent of veterans re-
20 port having losing some money to fraud, while 78
21 percent report encountering scams that have explic-
22 itly designed to exploit their military service.

23 (3) At the same time, adversaries from Russia,
24 China, and Iran are using information warfare to in-
25 fluence democracies across the world, and extremist

1 organizations often use digital communications to re-
2 cruit members. Influence campaigns from foreign
3 adversaries reached tens of millions of voters during
4 the 2016 and 2018 elections with racially and divi-
5 sively targeted messages. The United States can
6 fight these influences by ensuring that citizens of
7 the United States possess the necessary skills to dis-
8 cern disinformation and misinformation and protect
9 themselves from foreign influence campaigns.

10 (4) The Select Committee on Intelligence of the
11 Senate found in its investigation of the interference
12 in the 2016 election that social media posts by the
13 Internet Research Agency (IRA) of Russia reached
14 tens of millions of voters in 2016 and were meant
15 to pit the people of the United States against one
16 another and sow discord. Volume II of the Commit-
17 tee's investigation found that the Internet Research
18 Agency's Instagram account with the second largest
19 reach used the handle "@american.veterans" and
20 was "aimed at patriotic, conservative audiences, col-
21 lected 215,680 followers, and generated nearly 18.5
22 million engagements."

23 (5) A 2019 investigative report by the Vietnam
24 Veterans of America (VVA) titled "An Investigation
25 into Foreign Entities who are Targeting Troops and

1 Veterans Online”, found that the Internet Research
2 Agency targeted veterans and the followers of sev-
3 eral congressionally chartered veterans service orga-
4 nizations with at least 113 advertisements during
5 and following the 2016 election and that “this rep-
6 resents a fraction of the Russian activity that tar-
7 geted this community with divisive propaganda.”.
8 The report also found that foreign actors have been
9 impersonating veterans through social-media ac-
10 counts and interacting with veterans and veterans
11 groups on social media to spread propaganda and
12 disinformation. To counter these acts, Vietnam Vet-
13 erans of America recommended that the Department
14 of Veterans Affairs “immediately develop plans to
15 make the cyber-hygiene of veterans an urgent pri-
16 ority within the Department of Veterans Affairs.
17 The VA must educate and train veterans on per-
18 sonal cybersecurity: how to mitigate vulnerabilities,
19 vigilantly maintain safe practices, and recognize
20 threats, including how to identify instances of online
21 manipulation.”.

22 (6) The Cyberspace Solarium Commission, a bi-
23 cameral and bipartisan commission, established by
24 section 1652 of the John S. McCain National De-
25 fense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019 (Pub-

1 lic Law 115–232), concluded in its finished report
2 that the “U.S. government should promote digital
3 literacy, civics education, and public awareness to
4 build societal resilience to foreign, malign cyber-en-
5 abled information operations and that the U.S. gov-
6 ernment must ensure that individual Americans have
7 both the digital literacy tools and the civics edu-
8 cation they need to secure their networks and their
9 democracy from cyber-enabled information oper-
10 ations.”. The report recommended that Congress au-
11 thorize grant programs to do this.

12 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

13 It is the sense of Congress that, given the threat for-
14 eign influence campaigns pose for United States democ-
15 racy, the effect of online scams on veterans and their fami-
16 lies, and the findings and recommendations of Congress,
17 Federal agencies, and experts, Congress should imme-
18 diately act to pass legislative measures to increase digital
19 and media literacy, as well as cybersecurity best practices
20 among veterans of the United States.

21 **SEC. 4. VETERANS CYBERSECURITY AND DIGITAL LIT-**
22 **ERACY GRANT PROGRAM.**

23 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary shall es-
24 tablish a program to promote digital citizenship and media
25 literacy, through which the Secretary shall award grants

1 to eligible entities to enable those eligible entities to carry
2 out the activities described in subsection (c).

3 (b) APPLICATION.—An eligible entity seeking a grant
4 under the program required by subsection (a) shall submit
5 to the Secretary an application therefor at such time, in
6 such manner, and containing such information as the Sec-
7 retary may require, including, at a minimum the following:

8 (1) A description of the activities the eligible
9 entity intends to carry out with the grant funds.

10 (2) An estimate of the costs associated with
11 such activities.

12 (3) Such other information and assurances as
13 the Secretary may require.

14 (c) ACTIVITIES.—An eligible entity shall use the
15 amount of a grant awarded under the program required
16 by subsection (a) to carry out one or more of the following
17 activities to promote cybersecurity best practices and in-
18 crease digital and media literacy among veterans:

19 (1) Develop competencies in cybersecurity best
20 practices.

21 (2) Develop media literacy and digital citizen-
22 ship competencies by promoting veterans’—

23 (A) research and information fluency;

24 (B) critical thinking and problem solving
25 skills;

1 (C) technology operations and concepts;

2 (D) information and technological literacy;

3 (E) concepts of media and digital represen-
4 tation and stereotyping;

5 (F) understanding of explicit and implicit
6 media and digital messages;

7 (G) understanding of values and points of
8 view that are included and excluded in media
9 and digital content;

10 (H) understanding of how media and dig-
11 ital content may influence ideas and behaviors;

12 (I) understanding of the importance of ob-
13 taining information from multiple media
14 sources and evaluating sources for quality;

15 (J) understanding how information on dig-
16 ital platforms can be altered through algo-
17 rithms, editing, and augmented reality;

18 (K) ability to create media and digital con-
19 tent in civically and socially responsible ways;
20 and

21 (L) understanding of influence campaigns
22 conducted by foreign adversaries and the tactics
23 employed by foreign adversaries for conducting
24 influence campaigns.

25 (d) REPORTING.—

1 (1) REPORTS BY GRANT RECIPIENTS.—Each re-
2 recipient of a grant under the program required by
3 subsection (a) shall, not later than one year after
4 the date on which the recipient first receives funds
5 pursuant to the grant, submit to the Secretary a re-
6 port describing the activities the recipient carried
7 out using grant funds and the effectiveness of those
8 activities.

9 (2) REPORT BY THE SECRETARY.—Not later
10 than 90 days after the date on which the Secretary
11 receives the last report the Secretary expects to re-
12 ceive under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall sub-
13 mit to Congress a report describing the activities
14 carried out under this section and the effectiveness
15 of those activities.

16 (e) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
17 gress that the Secretary should—

18 (1) establish and maintain a list of eligible enti-
19 ties that receive a grant under the program required
20 by subsection (a), and individuals designated by
21 those eligible entities as participating individuals;
22 and

23 (2) make that list available to those eligible en-
24 tities and participating individuals in order to pro-
25 mote communication and further exchange of infor-

1 mation regarding sound digital citizenship and
2 media literacy practices among recipients of grants
3 under the program required by subsection (a).

4 (f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
5 authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
6 \$20,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2023, 2025, and
7 2027.

8 (g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

9 (1) CYBERSECURITY BEST PRACTICES.—The
10 term “cybersecurity best practices” means practices
11 and steps that users of computers and other inter-
12 net-connected devices take to maintain and improve
13 online security, maintain the proper functioning of
14 computers devices, and protect computers and de-
15 vices from cyberattacks and unauthorized use.

16 (2) DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP.—The term “digital
17 citizenship” means the ability to—

18 (A) safely, responsibly, and ethically use
19 communication technologies and digital infor-
20 mation technology tools and platforms;

21 (B) create and share media content using
22 principles of social and civic responsibility and
23 with awareness of the legal and ethical issues
24 involved; and

1 (C) participate in the political, economic,
2 social, and cultural aspects of life related to
3 technology, communications, and the digital
4 world by consuming and creating digital con-
5 tent, including media.

6 (3) ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term “eligible enti-
7 ty” means—

8 (A) a civil society organization, including
9 community groups, nongovernmental organiza-
10 tions, nonprofit organization, labor organiza-
11 tions, indigenous groups, charitable organiza-
12 tions, professional associations, and founda-
13 tions; and

14 (B) congressionally chartered veterans
15 service organizations.

16 (4) MEDIA LITERACY.—The term “media lit-
17 eracy” means the ability to—

18 (A) access relevant and accurate informa-
19 tion through media in a variety of forms;

20 (B) critically analyze media content and
21 the influences of different forms of media;

22 (C) evaluate the comprehensiveness, rel-
23 evance, credibility, authority, and accuracy of
24 information;

1 (D) make educated decisions based on in-
2 formation obtained from media and digital
3 sources;

4 (E) operate various forms of technology
5 and digital tools; and

6 (F) reflect on how the use of media and
7 technology may affect private and public life.

8 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
9 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

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