

most vulnerable communities, including homeless veterans and veterans experiencing housing instability. We have a responsibility to help those who served in uniform and stood ready to make the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

The CREDIT Act will identify the credit and financial counseling services needed to help our veterans avoid financial pitfalls and make informed decisions about their future.

Madam Speaker, again, I thank Chairman TAKANO for his partnership on this issue, and I urge my colleagues to support this commonsense, bipartisan legislation. Together, we can improve veterans' financial literacy to build a better life for themselves after they complete their service to our country.

Madam Speaker, I also thank my staff member, Jake Freed, who basically came up with this idea, after talking to various veterans groups, and put this together.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I am prepared to close.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all my colleagues to support this bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, we know that preventing homelessness is especially critical as we try to emerge out of this pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support Chairman PALLONE's bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JOHNSON of Texas. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 1257, the Homeless Veterans Credit Act, and would like my good friend Chairman PALLONE for his work to bring this bill to the floor.

The freedom and luxuries that we are afforded on a daily basis are made possible by the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. It is unthinkable that, after returning home from serving our country, veterans are often faced with several challenges including a lack of accessibility to quality and affordable housing. The state of Texas is home to the second largest population of veterans in the United States, and veterans homelessness is becoming an increasingly prevalent issue in our communities.

That is why I am proud to support the Homeless Veterans Credit Act. This bill will direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on the effectiveness of financial and credit counseling services currently available to homeless veterans and how those services can be improved so these veterans can move a step closer to securing stable housing, employment and income. Such studies are critical for us as legislators to determine the efficiency of the institutions, programs, and funding levels in place to assist veterans.

As Chair of the Congressional Homeless-ness Caucus, I remain committed to advocating on behalf of veterans experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. This pandemic has brought to light the stark inequities in access to housing for veterans, but I am confident that this bill will set the stage for transformative efforts to reform care for those in need.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to voting in favor of this bipartisan, commonsense legislation and would urge my colleagues to do the same.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1257, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

The title of the bill was amended so as to read: "A bill to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on the effect of financial and credit counseling for homeless veterans and veterans experiencing housing instability, and for other purposes."

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VA POLICE IMPROVEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2429) to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the staffing, transparency, and accountability of the law enforcement operations of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2429

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 "VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act".

SEC. 2. IMPROVEMENTS TO TRANSPARENCY OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OPERATIONS OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) PROVISION OF INFORMATION.—Section 902 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(e)(1) The Secretary shall publish on the internet website of each facility of the Department the following information with respect to the facility:

"(A) Summaries and statistics covering the previous five-year period regarding—

"(i) arrests made by and tickets issued by Department police officers;

"(ii) prosecutions, ticketing, and other actions relating to such arrests;

"(iii) the use of force and weapons discharge by Department police officers; and

"(iv) complaints, investigations, and disciplinary actions regarding Department police officers.

"(B) Contact information for employees of the Department and the public to directly contact the police force of the facility, including for an individual (or the representative, attorney, or authorized agent of the individual) to request information regarding the arrest, ticketing, detainment, use of force, or other police matters pertaining to that individual.

"(2) The Secretary shall ensure that each police force of a facility of the Department is able to provide to an individual who contacts the police force pursuant to paragraph (1)(B) the information described in such paragraph."

(b) USE OF BODY WORN CAMERAS BY DEPARTMENT POLICE OFFICERS.—

(1) REQUIREMENT.—Subsection (a) of such section 902 is amended by adding at the end the following new paragraph:

"(3) Beginning not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this paragraph, the Secretary shall require Department police officers to use cameras worn on the individual police officer's person that record and store audio and video (commonly known as 'body worn cameras')."

(2) GUIDANCE.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall issue, and make publicly available, guidance on the use of body worn cameras by Department police officers pursuant to section 902(a)(3) of title 38, United States Code, as amended by paragraph (1).

(3) CONSULTATION.—The Secretary shall issue the guidance under paragraph (2) in consultation with veterans service organizations, civil rights organizations, law enforcement organizations, law enforcement accreditation organizations, privacy rights organizations, and other relevant organizations or experts.

(c) DATA AND REPORTING ON POLICE INCIDENTS.—Section 902 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by subsection (a), is further amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(f) POLICE INCIDENTS.—(1)(A) The Secretary shall track and analyze the following information regarding the police force of the Department:

"(i) Arrests made by and tickets issued by Department police officers.

"(ii) Prosecutions, ticketing, and other actions relating to such arrests.

"(iii) The use of force and weapons discharge.

"(iv) Complaints, investigations, and disciplinary actions.

"(B) The Secretary shall carry out subparagraph (A) by implementing one or more Department-wide data systems.

"(2)(A) Beginning not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this subsection, the Secretary shall ensure that each incident described in subparagraph (C) is promptly reported to the Assistant Secretary with responsibility for operations, preparedness, security, and law enforcement functions.

"(B) The Assistant Secretary shall, in a timely manner—

"(i) review each incident described in subparagraph (C)(i) that is reported under subparagraph (A); and

"(ii) investigate each incident described in subparagraph (C)(ii) that is reported under subparagraph (A).

"(C) An incident described in this subparagraph is either of the following:

"(i) An incident, including an allegation, of the use of force by a Department police officer.

"(ii) An incident, including an allegation, of the use of force by a Department police officer that results in any person receiving medical attention."

(d) PLAN ON POLICE STAFFING.—The Secretary shall develop a plan that establishes minimum standards for police staffing at each facility of the Department, including with respect to—

(1) the number of Department police officers assigned to each facility; and

(2) the pay grades for such officers.

(e) REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit to the Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives and the Senate a report on the implementation of this section and the amendments made by this section. The report shall include the following:

(1) With respect to the staffing needs of the Department police force—

(A) identification of the amount of turnover among Department police officers;

(B) how the compensation for Department police officers affects such turnover;

(C) a comparison of such compensation with the compensation provided to specialty police units, such as police units at medical facilities and other police units in the same locality pay area; and

(D) the plan developed under subsection (d), including—

(i) estimates on the costs to carry out the plan; and

(ii) any recommendations for legislative actions required to carry out the plan.

(2) With respect to body worn cameras, a review of the implementation and use of body worn cameras by Department police officers, including under pilot programs carried out by the Secretary during the five-year period preceding the date of the report.

(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “body worn camera” means a camera worn on an individual police officer’s person that records and stores audio and video.

(2) The term “Department police officer” means an employee of the Department of Veterans Affairs described in section 902(a) of title 38, United States Code.

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

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and to insert extraneous material on H.R. 2429.

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

There was no objection.

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

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to support H.R. 2429, the VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act, introduced by former Committee on Veterans’ Affairs member Representative RICE from New York.

This bipartisan legislation cosponsored by Representative RADEWAGEN would improve the transparency and accountability of the VA police. Specifically, the legislation would require the VA police to publish online information about arrests and use of force, as well as establish a consistent way for the public to obtain more detailed information about those incidents.

Importantly, this bill would also require VA to have its police use body-worn cameras, publish guidance on the use of such cameras, improve tracking and analysis of arrests and other police actions, and develop a staffing plan that adequately supports every VA facility’s needs. Together, these improvements will build accountability and trust between the VA police and anyone who walks through VA facility doors across the country.

H.R. 2429 was reported favorably by the committee, and I ask my col-

leagues to join me in supporting the VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

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

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2429, the VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act.

This bill represents months of bipartisan work by the committee. I thank my colleagues for their efforts.

This bill would increase transparency and accountability in the VA police force by requiring each officer to wear a body-worn camera. It would also require VA to make police statistics public and available and report on police actions, including arrests and use of force.

Madam Speaker, 2 years ago, the VA began modernizing its police force. This legislation would support the VA’s ongoing efforts.

Veterans deserve safe environments in which to seek the care and benefits they have earned. I believe this legislation and the VA work will help provide those safe environments.

Madam Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from New York (Miss RICE), my good friend, a former member of the Veterans’ Affairs Committee, and the lead Democratic cosponsor.

Miss RICE of New York. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of my bipartisan bill, the VA Police Improvement and Accountability Act, H.R. 2429. This bill takes important steps to strengthen oversight and accountability for VA police and law enforcement operations.

A number of shortcomings with VA’s law enforcement operations were identified in a hearing held by the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs last Congress. Inadequate policing procedures and a lack of true oversight for the Department’s police force were two of the pressing issues raised at the hearing.

Challenges with management and oversight of VA police were also revealed in subsequent reports issued by the VA Office of Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office. These challenges include insufficient officer staffing, inappropriate conduct, and other concerning issues at VA facilities across the country.

On Long Island, I have worked with one of my constituents who was horribly mistreated by the Northport VA police. Our veterans deserve much better from an agency that is always supposed to be on their side.

My bill aims to address these pressing issues with the VA police by requiring the VA police to implement the use of body cameras, improve data collection and reporting on police incidents at VA facilities, and enact other important measures to strengthen oversight

and transparency for VA’s police program.

Madam Speaker, I thank my Republican co-lead, Representative RADEWAGEN, for joining me on this bill. I also thank Chairman TAKANO and Ranking Member BOST for helping to bring H.R. 2429 to the floor today.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation to help us better serve and protect our Nation’s veterans.

Mr. BOST. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support the bill of the gentlewoman from New York (Miss RICE).

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2429.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

VA FOIA REFORM ACT OF 2021

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2726) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a plan to reduce the backlog of requests for information made to the Department of Veterans Affairs pursuant to section 552 of title 5, United States Code, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2726

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 “VA FOIA Reform Act of 2021”.

SEC. 2. PLAN FOR REDUCTION OF BACKLOG OF FOIA REQUESTS.

(a) PLAN.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall establish and carry out a plan for the Secretary to meet, by not later than five years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the requirements of section 552 of title 5, United States Code, with respect to providing documents and information under such section within the timeframes required by such section. The plan shall include the following:

(1) Improving and acquiring technology, including with respect to searching email and other electronic information, and the timelines for such improvement, to ensure that the information technology of the Department of Veterans Affairs is capable of carrying out the plan.

(2) Identification of efficient procedures, policies, and systems of the Department that could be developed to allow employees of the Department responsible for replying to requests under such section 552 to search and review documents rather than other employees of the Department.

(3) A schedule for carrying out the plan, including key milestones and metrics.