

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.

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## 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

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## 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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