

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4028

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve services for veterans residing in rural areas.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NOVEMBER 5, 2009

Mr. WU (for himself, Mr. ALTMIRE, Mr. BLUMENAUER, Ms. BORDALLO, Mr. CHILDERS, Mr. COURTNEY, Mr. DEFazio, Mr. GORDON of Tennessee, Mr. HILL, Mr. HINCHEY, Mr. HINOJOSA, Mr. KAGEN, Mr. MINNICK, Mr. PETERSON, Mr. PIERLUISI, Mr. ROSS, Mr. SALAZAR, Mr. SCHRADER, Mr. WALZ, and Mr. WILSON of Ohio) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve services for veterans residing in rural areas.

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 “Rural Veterans Serv-
5 ices Outreach and Training Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. DEFINITION OF OUTREACH.**

2 Section 101 of title 38, United States Code, is
3 amended by adding at the end the following new para-
4 graph:

5 “(34) The term ‘outreach’ means the act or
6 process of reaching out in a systematic manner to
7 proactively provide information, services, and bene-
8 fits counseling to veterans, and to the spouses, chil-
9 dren, and parents of veterans, who may be eligible
10 to receive benefits under the laws administered by
11 the Secretary, and to ensure that such individuals
12 are fully informed about, and assisted in applying
13 for, any benefits and programs under such laws.”.

14 **SEC. 3. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS GRANT PRO-**
15 **GRAM FOR RURAL COUNTY VETERAN SERV-**
16 **ICE OFFICERS.**

17 (a) GRANTS.—Chapter 5 of title 38, United States
18 Code, is amended by inserting after section 532 the fol-
19 lowing new section:

20 **“§ 533. Grants to assist certain rural counties in em-**
21 **ploying veteran service officers; profes-**
22 **sional qualifications**

23 “(a) PURPOSE.—The purpose of this section is to im-
24 prove outreach and assistance to veterans, and to the
25 spouses, children, and parents of veterans, who may be
26 eligible to receive veterans’ or veterans-related benefits

1 and who are residing in rural counties through the train-
2 ing of covered veteran service officers to serve in rural
3 counties.

4 “(b) GRANT PROGRAM.—The Secretary shall carry
5 out a program to make competitive grants in accordance
6 with this section to provide financial assistance to State
7 departments of veterans affairs for the purpose stated in
8 subsection (a).

9 “(c) AMOUNT OF GRANT.—The amount of a grant
10 under this section shall be determined by the Secretary,
11 but may not exceed \$2,000,000.

12 “(d) USE OF FUNDS.—A State department of vet-
13 erans affairs that receives a grant under this section may
14 distribute any amount of the grant funds to qualified
15 State, county, or local agencies and qualified non-profit
16 veterans service organizations that provide casework serv-
17 ices to rural veterans. Grant funds distributed under this
18 subsection shall be used for the purpose stated in sub-
19 section (a).

20 “(e) ELIGIBILITY.—For purposes of this section, a
21 State is eligible for a grant under this section if it can
22 demonstrate any of the following:

23 “(1) That it has at least one county, in which
24 veterans reside, that does not have a covered vet-
25 erans service officer.

1 “(2) That it has at least one county, in which
2 veterans reside, that has a covered veterans service
3 officer who performs covered veterans service officer
4 functions on less than a full-time basis and that
5 county is able to demonstrate a need for additional
6 services by a covered veterans service officer.

7 “(3) That it has at least one county, in which
8 not fewer than 1,000 veterans reside, that currently
9 has a full-time covered veterans service officer, but
10 only if the county is able to demonstrate a need for
11 additional services by a covered veterans service offi-
12 cer.

13 “(f) COMPETITION FOR GRANT.—An eligible State
14 seeking a grant under this section shall submit to the Sec-
15 retary an application for the grant. The application shall
16 be in such form and shall contain such information as the
17 Secretary may require, including information establishing
18 that the State is an eligible State under this section. From
19 the applications submitted the Secretary shall approve
20 those applications that the Secretary determines to be the
21 most promising in carrying out the purposes of the grant
22 program. Each State whose application is selected by the
23 Secretary to receive a grant under the grant program shall
24 receive funds in an amount determined by the Secretary
25 under subsection (c). In making such determination, the

1 Secretary shall take into consideration the amount of the
2 total appropriation for the grant program, the relative size
3 of the State’s veteran population, and the funding nec-
4 essary to improve training and outreach of covered veteran
5 service officers in rural counties. Such funds shall go to
6 the State department of veterans affairs.

7 “(g) REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE RECEIPT OF FED-
8 ERAL FUNDS.—Each State receiving a grant under this
9 section shall—

10 “(1) provide to the Secretary information and
11 assurances that the funds received under the grant
12 program for the training of covered veteran service
13 officers will go to assist counties described in para-
14 graph (1), (2), or (3) of subsection (e);

15 “(2) provide an assurance that the State agency
16 shall match the Federal funds provided under this
17 section by providing at least 20 percent of the total
18 cost of the grant program; and

19 “(3) use funds received under this section only
20 to supplement the amount of funds that would, in
21 the absence of such Federal funds, be made avail-
22 able from non-Federal sources for the purposes of
23 this section, and not to supplant such funds.

24 “(h) GRANT FREQUENCY.—Grants under this section
25 shall be made on an annual basis.

1 “(i) COVERED VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER DE-
 2 FINED.—In this section, the term ‘covered veteran service
 3 officer’ means a qualified employee (regardless of job
 4 title)—

5 “(1) who is an employee of a State, county,
 6 local government, or a veterans service organization
 7 recognized under section 5902 of this title;

8 “(2) whose duties include providing to veterans
 9 advice and casework services related to benefits pro-
 10 vided under laws administered by the Secretary; and

11 “(3) who is accredited by the Department to
 12 file a claim with the Veterans Benefits Administra-
 13 tion on behalf of a claimant who is a veteran or a
 14 veteran’s survivor.

15 “(j) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
 16 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section
 17 \$100,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2010 through
 18 2013.”.

19 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 20 at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting
 21 after the item relating to section 531 the following new
 22 item:

“532. Grants to assist certain rural counties in employing veteran service offi-
 cers; professional qualifications.”.

23 (c) COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT.—The Comp-
 24 troller General shall conduct a review of the grant pro-

1 gram under section 533 of title 38, United States Code,
2 as added by subsection (a), and shall submit to Congress
3 a report on the results of such review. In carrying out
4 the review, the Comptroller General shall examine the ef-
5 fectiveness of the grant program in improving the rep-
6 resentation of veterans living in rural areas by trained in-
7 dividuals who assist the veterans in understanding and re-
8 ceiving access to the benefits to which they are entitled.

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