

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 4575

To amend the VA MISSION Act of 2018, to expand the peer specialist support program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to all medical centers of the Department, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JULY 20, 2021

Mr. PETERS (for himself, Mr. ALLRED, and Mr. MANN) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend the VA MISSION Act of 2018, to expand the peer specialist support program of the Department of Veterans Affairs to all medical centers of the Department, 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 “Veteran Peer Specialist
5 Act of 2021”.

1 **SEC. 2. EXPANSION OF PEER SPECIALIST SUPPORT PRO-**
2 **GRAM OF DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
3 **FAIRS.**

4 (a) EXPANSION.—Section 506 of the VA MISSION
5 Act of 2018 (Public Law 115–182; 38 U.S.C. 1701 note)
6 is amended—

7 (1) by redesignating subsections (d) through (f)
8 as subsections (e) through (g);

9 (2) in the heading of subsection (b), by striking
10 “TIMEFRAME” and inserting “INITIAL TIME-
11 FRAME”;

12 (3) in subsection (c)—

13 (A) in the heading, by striking “SELEC-
14 TION” and inserting “INITIAL SELECTION”; and

15 (B) in paragraph (1), by striking “The
16 Secretary shall” and inserting “In establishing
17 the program at initial locations, the Secretary
18 shall”;

19 (4) by inserting after subsection (c) the fol-
20 lowing new subsection:

21 “(d) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION OF PROGRAM; SE-
22 LECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

23 “(1) TIMEFRAME FOR EXPANSION.—The Sec-
24 retary shall make permanent and expand the pro-
25 gram to additional medical centers of the Depart-
26 ment as follows:

1 “(A) As of the date of the enactment of
2 the Veteran Peer Specialist Act of 2021, at
3 each medical center participating in the pro-
4 gram on the day before such date of enactment.

5 “(B) During the five-year period following
6 such date of enactment, at an additional 25
7 medical centers per year until the program is
8 carried out at each medical center of the De-
9 partment.

10 “(2) SELECTION OF ADDITIONAL LOCATIONS.—

11 In selecting medical centers for the expansion of the
12 program under paragraph (1)(B), until such time as
13 each medical center of the Department is partici-
14 pating in the program by establishing not fewer than
15 two peer specialists at the medical center, the Sec-
16 retary shall prioritize medical centers in the fol-
17 lowing areas:

18 “(A) Rural areas and other areas that are
19 underserved by the Department.

20 “(B) Areas that are not in close proximity
21 to an active duty military installation.

22 “(C) Areas representing different geo-
23 graphic locations, such as census tracts estab-
24 lished by the Bureau of the Census.”;

1 (5) in subsection (e), as redesignated by para-
2 graph (1)—

3 (A) in the heading, by striking “GENDER-
4 SPECIFIC SERVICES” and inserting “CONSIDER-
5 ATIONS FOR HIRING PEER SPECIALISTS”;

6 (B) in the matter preceding paragraph (1),
7 by striking “location selected under subsection
8 (e)” and inserting “medical center”; and

9 (C) by striking paragraph (2) and insert-
10 ing the following new paragraphs:

11 “(2) female peer specialists are hired and made
12 available to support female veterans who are treated
13 at each medical center; and

14 “(3) to the extent practical, peer specialists are
15 hired in demographic percentages that reflect the ra-
16 cial and ethnic demographic percentages of the over-
17 all veterans population.”; and

18 (6) by amending subsection (g), as redesignated
19 by paragraph (1), to read as follows:

20 “(g) REPORTS.—

21 “(1) PERIODIC REPORTS.—

22 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one
23 year after the date of the enactment of the Vet-
24 eran Peer Specialist Act of 2021, and annually
25 thereafter for five years, the Secretary shall

1 submit to the Committees on Veterans Affairs
2 of the House of Representatives and the Senate
3 a report on the program, including the expansion
4 of the program under subsection (d)(1).

5 “(B) ELEMENTS.—Each report under sub-
6 paragraph (A) shall include, with respect to the
7 one-year period preceding the submission of the
8 report, the following:

9 “(i) The findings and conclusions of
10 the Secretary with respect to the program.

11 “(ii) An assessment of the benefits of
12 the program to veterans and family mem-
13 bers of veterans.

14 “(iii) An assessment of the effective-
15 ness of peer specialists in engaging under
16 subsection (f) with health care providers in
17 the community and veterans served by
18 such providers.

19 “(iv) The name and location of each
20 medical center where new peer specialists
21 were hired.

22 “(v) The number of new peer special-
23 ists hired at each medical center pursuant
24 to this section and the total number of

1 peer specialists within the Department
2 hired pursuant to this section.

3 “(vi) An assessment of any barriers
4 confronting the recruitment, training, or
5 retention of peer specialists.

6 “(2) FINAL REPORT.—Not later than one year
7 after the Secretary determines that the program is
8 being carried out at each medical center of the De-
9 partment, the Secretary shall submit to the Commit-
10 tees on Veterans Affairs of the House of Represent-
11 atives and the Senate a report notifying such com-
12 mittees of the determination.”.

13 (b) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
14 authorized to be appropriated to carry out the amend-
15 ments made by this section \$5,000,000 for each of fiscal
16 years 2022 through 2027.

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