

113<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS  
2<sup>D</sup> SESSION

# H. R. 5589

To direct the Secretary of Education to establish a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, and improving veteran student centers.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 18, 2014

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 direct the Secretary of Education to establish a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, and improving 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:

1           (1) Over 1,000,000 veterans attended institu-  
2           tions of higher education in 2012.

3           (2) Veterans face unique hardships in  
4           transitioning from the battlefield to the classroom  
5           and eventually to the workforce.

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 the Student Vet-  
8           erans of 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) Budget constraints often make it difficult or  
18          impossible for institutions of higher education to  
19          dedicate space to veteran offices, lounges, or student  
20          centers.

21          (10) The 110th Congress authorized the fund-  
22          ing of veteran student centers through the Centers  
23          of Excellence for Veteran Student Success under  
24          part T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of  
25          1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t).

1           (11) According to the Department of Edu-  
2 cation, federally funded veteran student centers and  
3 staff have generated improved recruitment, reten-  
4 tion, and graduation rates, have helped veteran stu-  
5 dents feel better connected across campus, and have  
6 directly contributed to student veterans' successful  
7 academic outcomes.

8 **SEC. 3. GRANT PROGRAM TO ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND**  
9 **IMPROVE VETERAN STUDENT CENTERS.**

10       (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—From the amounts appro-  
11 priated to carry out this Act, the Secretary of Education  
12 shall establish a program to award grants to institutions  
13 of higher education to assist in the establishment, mainte-  
14 nance, and improvement of veteran student centers.

15       (b) ELIGIBILITY.—

16           (1) APPLICATION.—An institution of higher  
17 education seeking a grant under subsection (a) shall  
18 submit to the Secretary an application at such time,  
19 in such manner, and containing such information as  
20 the Secretary may require.

21           (2) CRITERIA.—The Secretary may award a  
22 grant under subsection (a) to an institution of high-  
23 er education if the Secretary determines that the in-  
24 stitution of higher education meets the following cri-  
25 teria:

1 (A) The institution has a population of not  
2 less than 15,000 students, of which not less  
3 than one percent are veterans or members of  
4 the Armed Forces.

5 (B) The institution is located in a region  
6 or community that has a significant population  
7 of veterans.

8 (C) The institution carries out programs or  
9 activities that assist veterans in the local com-  
10 munity.

11 (D) The institution presents a sustain-  
12 ability plan to demonstrate that its veteran stu-  
13 dent center will be maintained and will continue  
14 to operate after the term of the grant has  
15 ended.

16 (c) USE OF FUNDS.—An institution of higher edu-  
17 cation that is awarded a grant under subsection (a) shall  
18 use such grant to establish, maintain, or improve a veteran  
19 student center.

20 (d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

21 (1) DURATION.—Each grant awarded under  
22 subsection (a) shall be for a 4-year period.

23 (2) TOTAL AMOUNT OF GRANT AND SCHED-  
24 ULE.—Each grant awarded under subsection (a)  
25 may not exceed a total of \$500,000. Subject to sub-

1 section (e), the Secretary shall disburse to the insti-  
2 tution of higher education the amounts awarded  
3 under the grant in such amounts and at such times  
4 during the grant period as the Secretary determines  
5 appropriate.

6 (e) EVALUATION.—The Secretary shall annually  
7 evaluate each institution of higher education that is  
8 awarded a grant under subsection (a) to determine wheth-  
9 er the institution uses the grant in accordance with this  
10 section. If the Secretary determines that the institution  
11 of higher education is not using the grant in accordance  
12 with this section, the Secretary may delay future disburse-  
13 ments of amounts described in subsection (d)(2) until the  
14 Secretary determines that the institution of higher edu-  
15 cation has corrected any deficiencies and will use such  
16 amounts in accordance with this section.

17 (f) REPORT.—Not later than 3 years after the date  
18 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit  
19 to Congress a report on the grant program established  
20 under subsection (a), including—

21 (1) the number of grants awarded;

22 (2) the institutions of higher education that  
23 have received grants;

24 (3) with respect to each such institution of  
25 higher education—

1 (A) the amounts awarded; and

2 (B) how such institution used such  
3 amounts; and

4 (4) a determination by the Secretary with re-  
5 spect to whether the grant program should be ex-  
6 tended or expanded.

7 (g) TERMINATION.—The authority of the Secretary  
8 to carry out the grant program established under sub-  
9 section (a) shall terminate on the date that is 4 years after  
10 the date on which the grant program is established.

11 (h) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

12 (1) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—The  
13 term “institution of higher education” has the  
14 meaning given the term in section 101 of the Higher  
15 Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

16 (2) VETERAN STUDENT CENTER.—The term  
17 “veteran student center” means a dedicated space  
18 on a campus of an institution of higher education  
19 that provides students who are veterans or members  
20 of the Armed Forces with the following:

21 (A) A lounge or meeting space for such  
22 students and veterans in the community.

23 (B) A centralized office for veteran serv-  
24 ices that—

- 1 (i) is staffed by trained employees and  
2 volunteers; and
- 3 (ii) provides such students with assist-  
4 ance 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 such  
10 students;
- 11 (IV) understanding and obtaining  
12 benefits provided by the Federal Gov-  
13 ernment or a State for which such  
14 students may be eligible; and
- 15 (V) understanding how to suc-  
16 ceed in the institution of higher edu-  
17 cation, including by understanding  
18 how to transfer educational credits.

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