

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 8449

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to collect and analyze data regarding suicides and attempted suicides by veterans on the property of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

Mr. CROW (for himself, Mr. KELLY of Mississippi, Mr. DESJARLAIS, Ms. OMAR, and Mr. CRIST) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to collect and analyze data regarding suicides and attempted suicides by veterans on the property of the Department of Veterans Affairs, 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 “Veterans’ Sentinel
5 Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM ON COLLECTING AND ANALYZING**
2 **DATA REGARDING CERTAIN VETERAN SUI-**
3 **CIDES.**

4 (a) PILOT PROGRAM.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 90 days after
6 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
7 of Veterans Affairs shall establish in the Office of
8 Mental Health and Suicide Prevention a pilot pro-
9 gram under which the Secretary establishes a work-
10 ing group in the Office to collect and analyze data
11 regarding on-campus suicides and on-campus at-
12 tempted suicides.

13 (2) WORKING GROUP.—

14 (A) MEMBERSHIP.—The members of the
15 working group established under paragraph (1)
16 shall be selected from among staff representing
17 each of the following:

18 (i) The Office of Mental Health and
19 Suicide Prevention.

20 (ii) The Veterans Health Administra-
21 tion.

22 (iii) The Veterans Benefits Adminis-
23 tration.

24 (iv) The National Cemeteries Admin-
25 istration.

1 (v) The Office of Operations, Secu-
2 rity, and Preparedness of the Department.

3 (vi) The National Patient Safety Cen-
4 ters of the Department.

5 (vii) Any other element of the Depart-
6 ment as the Secretary determines appro-
7 priate.

8 (B) REPORTING.—The working group shall
9 report directly to the Executive Director of the
10 Office of Mental Health and Suicide Preven-
11 tion.

12 (3) METHODOLOGY.—In collecting and ana-
13 lyzing the information under paragraph (1), the
14 working group shall—

15 (A) use root cause analysis to review all
16 on-campus suicides and on-campus attempted
17 suicides;

18 (B) with respect to on-campus suicides—

19 (i) conduct Behavioral Health Au-
20 topsy Program assessments, including fam-
21 ily interviews; and

22 (ii) document reasons for any defi-
23 ciencies in the data collected; and

24 (C) not less frequently than every 90 days,
25 communicate with the medical centers and field

1 offices of the Department in order to coordinate
2 the collection and review actions of the working
3 group with such actions carried out by the med-
4 ical centers and field offices.

5 (4) DATA COLLECTION INTAKE IMPROVE-
6 MENTS.—The working group shall consider, and
7 may implement for purposes of the pilot program
8 under paragraph (1), improvements to the process
9 by which the Secretary collects data on on-campus
10 suicides and on-campus attempted suicides to unify
11 the disparate sources of such data, including with
12 respect to—

13 (A) modifying incident reports and other
14 methods to collect data, including both suicide
15 and attempted suicide report fields;

16 (B) developing and ensuring that each
17 data source, including the Behavioral Health
18 Autopsy Program assessment, relating to on-
19 campus suicides and on-campus attempted sui-
20 cides include a specified section for such on-
21 campus incidents; and

22 (C) developing an associated management
23 system to consolidate all relevant data for on-
24 campus suicides and on-campus attempted sui-
25 cides, including such data from Behavioral

1 Health Autopsy Program assessments, health
2 records of the Department, root cause analyses,
3 incident reports, and other sources of data.

4 (5) BRIEFINGS.—Not later than one year after
5 the date of the enactment of this Act, and annually
6 thereafter during the life of the pilot program under
7 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall provide to the
8 Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of
9 Representatives and the Senate a briefing on the
10 progress and findings of the working group estab-
11 lished under such paragraph.

12 (6) REPORT.—Not later than 30 days after the
13 date on which the pilot program under paragraph
14 (1) is completed, the Secretary shall submit to the
15 Committees on Veterans' Affairs of the House of
16 Representatives and the Senate a report detailing—

17 (A) the effectiveness of the working group
18 established under such paragraph; and

19 (B) any recommendations to enhance the
20 data collection and management by the Sec-
21 retary with respect to on-campus suicides and
22 on-campus suicide attempts, including improve-
23 ments identified under paragraph (4).

1 (7) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out
2 the pilot program under paragraph (1) for a period
3 that is not less than two years.

4 (8) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

5 (A) The term “on-campus attempted sui-
6 cide” means an attempted suicide by a veteran
7 that occurs on property of the Department of
8 Veterans Affairs.

9 (B) The term “on-campus suicide” means
10 a suicide by a veteran that occurs on property
11 of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

12 (b) ANNUAL REPORTS.—Section 1709B of title 38,
13 United States Code, is amended—

14 (1) by redesignating subsection (b) as sub-
15 section (c);

16 (2) by inserting after subsection (a) the fol-
17 lowing new subsection (b):

18 “(b) ON-CAMPUS SUICIDES.—On an annual basis,
19 the Secretary shall—

20 “(1) evaluate the statistical trends of suicides
21 and attempted suicides by veterans that occur on the
22 property of the Department; and

23 “(2) determine recommendations for preventing
24 such suicides and attempted suicides.”; and

25 (3) in subsection (c), as so redesignated—

1 (A) by redesignating paragraph (2) as
2 paragraph (3); and

3 (B) by inserting after paragraph (1) the
4 following new paragraph (2):

5 “(2) Beginning with the report submitted in
6 2022, the matters under subsection (b), including
7 any other matters relating to such matters as the
8 Executive Director of the Office of Mental Health
9 and Suicide Prevention determines appropriate.”.

10 (c) COMPTROLLER GENERAL REPORT ON THE OF-
11 FICE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
13 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
14 Comptroller General of the United States shall sub-
15 mit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of the
16 House of Representatives and the Senate a report
17 on—

18 (A) the actions the Office of Mental Health
19 and Suicide Prevention of the Department of
20 Veterans Affairs has taken to meet the priority
21 objective of the Department with respect to pre-
22 venting veteran suicide;

23 (B) the challenges the Office has faced in
24 making such actions; and

25 (C) recommendations for improvements.

- 1 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report under paragraph
2 (1) shall include, with respect to the Office, an anal-
3 ysis of—
- 4 (A) staffing and resource levels;
 - 5 (B) policies and processes;
 - 6 (C) leadership structure and stability;
 - 7 (D) identification and prioritization of ac-
8 tivities;
 - 9 (E) organizational and reporting structure
10 within the Department; and
 - 11 (F) any other matters the Comptroller
12 General determines appropriate.

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