

113TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 1583

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct an education program and peer support program for the education and training of family members and caregivers of veterans with mental health disorders.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 28, 2013

Mr. SANDERS introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct an education program and peer support program for the education and training of family members and caregivers of veterans with mental health disorders.

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 “Mental Health Support  
5 for Veteran Families and Caregivers Act of 2013”.

1 **SEC. 2. EDUCATION PROGRAM AND PEER SUPPORT PRO-**  
2 **GRAM FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND CARE-**  
3 **GIVERS OF VETERANS WITH MENTAL**  
4 **HEALTH DISORDERS.**

5 (a) PROGRAMS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days  
7 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
8 retary of Veterans Affairs shall establish an edu-  
9 cation program (in this section referred to as the  
10 “education program”) and a peer support program  
11 (in this section referred to as the “peer support pro-  
12 gram”) for the education and training of family  
13 members and caregivers of eligible veterans with  
14 mental health disorders.

15 (2) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

16 (A) FAMILY MEMBER; CAREGIVER.—The  
17 terms “family member” and “caregiver” have  
18 the meaning given those terms in section  
19 1720G(d) of title 38, United States Code.

20 (B) ELIGIBLE VETERAN.—The term “eligi-  
21 ble veteran” means a veteran who is enrolled in  
22 the health care system established under section  
23 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.

24 (b) EDUCATION PROGRAM.—

25 (1) IN GENERAL.—Under the education pro-  
26 gram, the Secretary shall provide a course of edu-

1 cation to family members and caregivers of eligible  
2 veterans on matters relating to coping with mental  
3 health disorders in veterans.

4 (2) DURATION.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—The education program  
6 shall be carried out during the four-year period  
7 beginning on the date of the commencement of  
8 the education program.

9 (B) AUTHORITY FOR EXTENSION.—The  
10 Secretary may extend the duration of the edu-  
11 cation program for an additional four years.

12 (3) LOCATIONS.—

13 (A) IN GENERAL.—Except as required by  
14 subparagraph (C), the Secretary shall carry out  
15 the education program at the following facilities  
16 of the Department of Veterans Affairs:

17 (i) Not less than 10 medical centers of  
18 the Department.

19 (ii) Not less than 10 clinics of the De-  
20 partment.

21 (iii) Not less than 10 centers for read-  
22 justment counseling and related mental  
23 health services for veterans under section  
24 1712A of title 38, United States Code  
25 (commonly referred to as “vet centers”).

1 (B) CONSIDERATIONS.—In selecting loca-  
2 tions for the program, the Secretary shall con-  
3 sider the feasibility and advisability of selecting  
4 locations in the following areas:

5 (i) Rural areas.

6 (ii) Areas that are not in close prox-  
7 imity to an active duty installation.

8 (iii) Areas in different geographic lo-  
9 cations.

10 (C) EXPANSION OF LOCATIONS.—Not later  
11 than two years after the date of the commence-  
12 ment of the education program, the Secretary  
13 shall expand the number of facilities at which  
14 the Secretary is carrying out the education pro-  
15 gram to include the following:

16 (i) Not less than 10 additional med-  
17 ical centers of the Department.

18 (ii) Not less than 10 additional clinics  
19 of the Department.

20 (iii) Not less than 10 additional vet  
21 centers.

22 (4) CONTRACTS.—

23 (A) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the  
24 education program, the Secretary shall enter  
25 into contracts with qualified entities described

1 in subparagraph (B) to offer the course of edu-  
2 cation described in paragraph (5) to family  
3 members and caregivers of eligible veterans and  
4 covered veterans.

5 (B) QUALIFIED ENTITY DESCRIBED.—A  
6 qualified entity described in this subparagraph  
7 is a non-profit entity with experience in mental  
8 health education and outreach, including work  
9 with children, teens, and young adults, that—

10 (i) uses high quality, relevant, and  
11 age-appropriate information in educational  
12 programming, materials, and coursework,  
13 including such programming, materials,  
14 and coursework for children, teens, and  
15 young adults; and

16 (ii) works with agencies, departments,  
17 nonprofit mental health organizations,  
18 early childhood educators, and mental  
19 health providers to develop educational  
20 programming, materials, and coursework.

21 (C) PRIORITY.—In entering into contracts  
22 under this paragraph, the Secretary shall give  
23 priority to qualified entities that, to the max-  
24 imum extent practicable, use Internet tech-  
25 nology for the delivery of course content in an

1 effort to expand the availability of support serv-  
2 ices, especially in rural areas.

3 (5) ELEMENTS.—The course of education de-  
4 scribed in this paragraph shall consist of not less  
5 than 10 weeks of education and shall include the fol-  
6 lowing:

7 (A) General education on different mental  
8 health disorders, including information to im-  
9 prove understanding of the experiences of indi-  
10 viduals suffering from those disorders.

11 (B) Techniques for handling crisis situa-  
12 tions and administering mental health first aid  
13 to individuals suffering from mental health dis-  
14 orders.

15 (C) Techniques for coping with the stress  
16 of living with someone with a mental health dis-  
17 order.

18 (D) Information on additional services  
19 available for family members and caregivers  
20 through the Department or community organi-  
21 zations and providers related to mental health  
22 disorders.

23 (E) Such other matters as the Secretary  
24 considers appropriate.

25 (6) INSTRUCTORS.—

1 (A) TRAINING.—Each instructor of the  
2 course of education described in paragraph (5)  
3 shall maintain a level of proficiency in the  
4 course of education as determined by the Sec-  
5 retary, and shall submit proof of that level of  
6 proficiency to the Secretary at such time and in  
7 such manner as the Secretary determines ap-  
8 propriate.

9 (B) INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE COMPLETED  
10 THE COURSE AS INSTRUCTORS.—Commencing  
11 as of the date that is two years after the date  
12 of the commencement of the education pro-  
13 gram, any individual who has successfully com-  
14 pleted the course of education described in  
15 paragraph (5) and has successfully completed  
16 such additional training as is required for in-  
17 structors pursuant to subparagraph (A) may  
18 act as an instructor in the course of education.

19 (7) MONITORING OF INSTRUCTION.—

20 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall se-  
21 lect mental health care providers of the Depart-  
22 ment to monitor, in consultation with primary  
23 care providers, the progress of the instruction  
24 provided under the education program. Such  
25 mental health care providers shall carry out

1 such monitoring by meeting quarterly with in-  
2 structors of the course of education described in  
3 paragraph (5).

4 (B) REPORT.—Not less frequently than  
5 semiannually, each mental health care provider  
6 selected under subparagraph (A) shall submit  
7 to the Secretary a report on the progress of the  
8 instruction provided under the education pro-  
9 gram.

10 (c) PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—Under the peer support pro-  
12 gram, the Secretary shall provide peer support to  
13 family members and caregivers of eligible veterans  
14 on matters relating to coping with mental health dis-  
15 orders in veterans.

16 (2) LOCATIONS.—The Secretary shall provide  
17 peer support under the peer support program at  
18 each location at which the Secretary provides edu-  
19 cation under the education program.

20 (3) ELEMENTS.—Peer support under the peer  
21 support program shall consist of meetings in group  
22 settings between a peer support coordinator under  
23 paragraph (4) and family members and caregivers of  
24 eligible veterans on matters relating to coping with  
25 mental health disorders in veterans. At each loca-



1 tion, those meetings shall be conducted not less  
2 often than twice each calendar quarter.

3 (4) PEER SUPPORT COORDINATOR.—

4 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary, acting  
5 through the director of each participating facil-  
6 ity, shall select an individual who has success-  
7 fully completed the course of education de-  
8 scribed in subsection (b)(5) to serve as a peer  
9 support coordinator for each such facility to  
10 carry out the peer support program.

11 (B) PROFICIENCY OF INSTRUCTORS.—

12 Each peer support coordinator shall maintain a  
13 level of proficiency in peer support as deter-  
14 mined by the Secretary, and shall submit proof  
15 of that level of proficiency to the Secretary at  
16 such time and in such manner as the Secretary  
17 determines appropriate.

18 (5) MENTORS.—The Secretary shall select a  
19 mental health care provider of the Department to  
20 serve as a mentor to each peer support coordinator.

21 (6) MONITORING OF PEER SUPPORT COORDINA-  
22 TORS.—The mental health care providers of the De-  
23 partment selected under subsection (b)(7) shall—

1 (A) monitor the progress of the peer sup-  
2 port program by meeting quarterly with peer  
3 support coordinators; and

4 (B) not less frequently than semiannually,  
5 submit to the Secretary a report on the  
6 progress of the peer support program.

7 (d) SURVEYS.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall conduct  
9 a comprehensive and statistically significant survey  
10 of the satisfaction of individuals that have partici-  
11 pated in the course of education described in sub-  
12 section (b)(5) and individuals that have participated  
13 in the peer support program that includes the fol-  
14 lowing:

15 (A) The general satisfaction of those indi-  
16 viduals with the education and assistance pro-  
17 vided in the education program and the peer  
18 support program.

19 (B) The perceived effectiveness of the edu-  
20 cation program and the peer support program  
21 in providing education and assistance that is  
22 useful for those individuals.

23 (C) The applicability of the education pro-  
24 gram and the peer support program to the  
25 issues faced by those individuals.

1           (D) Such other matters as the Secretary  
2 considers appropriate.

3           (E) A representative sample of the infor-  
4 mation required by subparagraphs (A) through  
5 (D) from each Veterans Integrated Service Net-  
6 work that is participating in the education pro-  
7 gram and the peer support program.

8           (2) COMPILATION OF INFORMATION.—The in-  
9 formation compiled as a result of the surveys re-  
10 quired by paragraph (1) shall be included in the an-  
11 nual report required by subsection (e)(1).

12       (e) REPORTS.—

13           (1) ANNUAL REPORT.—

14           (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
15 after the date of the commencement of the edu-  
16 cation program and not later than September  
17 30 each year thereafter until 2017, the Sec-  
18 retary shall submit to the Committee on Vet-  
19 erans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee  
20 on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Represent-  
21 atives a report on the education program and  
22 the peer support program.

23           (B) ELEMENTS.—Each report submitted  
24 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-  
25 lowing:

1 (i) The number of individuals that  
2 participated in the course of education de-  
3 scribed in subsection (b)(5) during the  
4 year preceding the submission of the re-  
5 port.

6 (ii) The number of individuals that  
7 participated in the peer support program  
8 during the year preceding the submission  
9 of the report.

10 (iii) A detailed analysis of the surveys  
11 conducted under subsection (d) with re-  
12 spect to the individuals described in clause  
13 (i) and (ii).

14 (iv) A summary of feedback with re-  
15 spect to the education program and the  
16 peer support program received from the  
17 mentors selected under subsection (e)(5)  
18 and the monitors selected under subsection  
19 (b)(7).

20 (v) The degree to which veterans and  
21 family members and caregivers of veterans  
22 are aware of the eligibility requirements  
23 for enrollment in the education program  
24 and the peer support program.

1 (vi) Any plans for expansion of the  
2 education program and the peer support  
3 program.

4 (vii) The interim findings and conclu-  
5 sions of the Secretary with respect to the  
6 success of the education program and the  
7 peer support program.

8 (2) FINAL REPORT.—

9 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
10 after the completion of the education program,  
11 the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on  
12 Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Com-  
13 mittee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of  
14 Representatives a report on the feasibility and  
15 advisability of continuing the education pro-  
16 gram and the peer support program.

17 (B) ELEMENTS.—The report submitted  
18 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-  
19 lowing:

20 (i) A detailed analysis of the surveys  
21 conducted under subsection (d).

22 (ii) The feasibility and advisability of  
23 continuing the education program without  
24 entering into contracts for the course of  
25 education described in subsection (b)(5)

1 and instead using peer support coordina-  
2 tors selected under subsection (c)(4) as in-  
3 structors of the course of education.

4 (iii) The feasibility and advisability of  
5 expanding the education program and the  
6 peer support program.

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