

118TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 498

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating Student Veteran Centers.

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## IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

FEBRUARY 16, 2023

Ms. ROSEN (for herself and Mr. RUBIO) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating Student Veteran 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:

8 (1) More than 1,000,000 veterans attend insti-  
9 tutions of higher education each year.

1           (2) Veterans face unique challenges in  
2           transitioning from the battlefield to the classroom  
3           and eventually to the workforce, including: age dif-  
4           ferences, family obligations, significant time away  
5           from academic life, and service-related disabilities.

6           (3) The National Education Association found  
7           that student veterans can feel lonely and vulnerable  
8           on campus and that “connecting student veterans  
9           can effectively ease this isolation” by bringing to-  
10          gether new student veterans with those who have al-  
11          ready successfully navigated the first few semesters  
12          of college.

13          (4) According to Mission United—a United  
14          Way program that helps veterans re-acclimate to ci-  
15          vilian life—it is often “essential” for student vet-  
16          erans to be mentored by “another veteran who un-  
17          derstands their mindset and experience”.

18          (5) Student Veteran Centers are recognized as  
19          an institutional best practice by Student Veterans of  
20          America.

21          (6) The American Council on Education, which  
22          represents more than 1,700 institutions of higher  
23          education across the United States, has called hav-  
24          ing a dedicated space for veterans on campus “a  
25          promising way for colleges and universities to better

1     serve veterans on campus” and a “critical” compo-  
2     nent of many colleges’ efforts to serve their student  
3     veterans.

4             (7) The Department of Education included as  
5     one of its 8 Keys to Veterans’ Success that colleges  
6     and universities should “coordinate and centralize  
7     campus efforts for all veterans, together with the  
8     creation of a designated space for them”.

9             (8) Budget constraints often make it difficult or  
10    impossible for institutions of higher education to  
11    dedicate space to veteran offices, lounges, or student  
12    centers.

13            (9) The 110th Congress authorized the funding  
14    of Student Veteran Centers through the Centers of  
15    Excellence for Veteran Student Success under part  
16    T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of 1965  
17    (20 U.S.C. 1161t). Congress also chose to appro-  
18    priate funding for this program in subsequent years,  
19    most recently for fiscal year 2023 under the Consoli-  
20    dated Appropriations Act, 2023 (Public Law 117–  
21    328).

22            (10) According to the Department of Edu-  
23    cation, federally funded Student Veteran Centers  
24    and staff have generated improved recruitment, re-  
25    tention, and graduation rates, have helped student

1 veterans feel better connected across campus, and  
 2 have directly contributed to the successful academic  
 3 outcomes of student veterans.

4 **SEC. 3. GRANT PROGRAM TO ESTABLISH, MAINTAIN, AND**  
 5 **IMPROVE STUDENT VETERAN CENTERS.**

6 Part T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of  
 7 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t) is amended to read as follows:

8 **“PART T—GRANTS FOR STUDENT VETERAN**  
 9 **CENTERS**

10 **“SEC. 873. GRANTS FOR STUDENT VETERAN CENTERS.**

11 “(a) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—Subject to the avail-  
 12 ability of appropriations under subsection (h), the Sec-  
 13 retary shall award grants to institutions of higher edu-  
 14 cation or consortia of institutions of higher education to  
 15 assist in the establishment, maintenance, improvement,  
 16 and operation of Student Veteran Centers.

17 “(b) ELIGIBILITY.—

18 “(1) APPLICATION.—An institution or Consor-  
 19 tium seeking a grant under subsection (a) shall sub-  
 20 mit to the Secretary an application at such time, in  
 21 such manner, and containing such information as  
 22 the Secretary may require.

23 “(2) CRITERIA.—The Secretary may award a  
 24 grant under subsection (a) to an institution or a

1 consortium if the institution or consortium meets  
2 each of the following criteria:

3 “(A) The institution or consortium enrolls  
4 in undergraduate or graduate courses—

5 “(i) a significant number of student  
6 veterans, members of the Armed Forces  
7 serving on active duty, or members of a re-  
8 serve component of the Armed Forces; or

9 “(ii) a significant percentage of stu-  
10 dent veterans, members of the Armed  
11 Forces serving on active duty, or members  
12 of a reserve component of the Armed  
13 Forces,

14 as measured by comparing, for the most recent aca-  
15 demic year for which data are available, the number  
16 or percentage of student veterans, members of the  
17 Armed Forces serving on active duty, and members  
18 of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who are  
19 enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses at the  
20 institution or consortium, with the average number  
21 or percentage of student veterans, members of the  
22 Armed Forces serving on active duty, and members  
23 of a reserve component of the Armed Forces who  
24 were enrolled in undergraduate or graduate courses

1 at comparable institutions or consortia of institu-  
2 tions.

3 “(B) The institution or consortium pre-  
4 sents a sustainability plan to demonstrate that  
5 the Student Veteran Center will be maintained  
6 and will continue to operate after the grant pe-  
7 riod has ended.

8 “(3) SELECTION CRITERIA.—In awarding  
9 grants under subsection (a), the Secretary shall pro-  
10 vide the following:

11 “(A) Priority consideration to institutions  
12 or consortia that meet one or more of the fol-  
13 lowing criteria:

14 “(i) The institution or consortium is  
15 located in a region or community that has  
16 a significant population of veterans.

17 “(ii) The institution or consortium  
18 considers the need to serve student vet-  
19 erans at a wide range of institutions of  
20 higher education, including the need to  
21 provide equitable distribution of grants to  
22 institutions of various sizes, geographic lo-  
23 cations, and institutions in urban and  
24 rural areas.

1           “(iii) The institution or consortium  
2 carries out programs or activities that as-  
3 sist veterans in the local community, and  
4 the spouses or partners and children of  
5 student veterans.

6           “(iv) The institution or consortium  
7 partners in its veteran-specific program-  
8 ming with nonprofit veteran service organi-  
9 zations, local workforce development orga-  
10 nizations, or other institutions of higher  
11 education.

12           “(v) The institution or consortium  
13 commits to hiring a staff at the Student  
14 Veteran Center that includes veterans (in-  
15 cluding student veteran volunteers and stu-  
16 dent veterans participating in a Federal  
17 work-study program under part C of title  
18 IV, a work-study program administered by  
19 the Secretary of Veteran Affairs, or a  
20 State work-study program).

21           “(vi) The institution or consortium  
22 commits to providing an orientation for  
23 student veterans that—

1           “(I) is separate from the new  
2           student orientation provided by the in-  
3           stitution or consortium; and

4           “(II) provides student veterans  
5           with information on the benefits and  
6           resources available to such students at  
7           or through the institution or consor-  
8           tium.

9           “(vii) The institution or consortium  
10          commits to using a portion of the grant re-  
11          ceived under this section to develop or  
12          maintain a student veteran retention pro-  
13          gram carried out by the Student Veteran  
14          Center.

15          “(viii) The institution or consortium  
16          commits to providing mental health coun-  
17          seling to its student veterans (and the  
18          spouses or partners and children of such  
19          students).

20          “(B) Equitable distribution of such grants  
21          to institutions or consortia of various sizes, geo-  
22          graphic locations, and in urban and rural areas.

23          “(c) USE OF FUNDS.—

24                 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An institution or consor-  
25          tium that is awarded a grant under subsection (a)



1 shall use such grant to establish, maintain, improve,  
2 or operate a Student Veteran Center.

3 “(2) OTHER ALLOWABLE USES.—An institution  
4 or consortium receiving a grant under subsection (a)  
5 may use a portion of such grant to carry out sup-  
6 portive instruction services for student veterans, in-  
7 cluding—

8 “(A) assistance with special admissions  
9 and transfer of credit from previous postsec-  
10 ondary education or experience; and

11 “(B) any other support services the insti-  
12 tution or consortium determines to be necessary  
13 to ensure the success of student veterans in  
14 achieving education and career goals.

15 “(d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

16 “(1) DURATION.—Each grant awarded under  
17 subsection (a) shall be for a 4-year period.

18 “(2) TOTAL AMOUNT OF GRANT AND SCHED-  
19 ULE.—Each grant awarded under subsection (a)  
20 may not exceed a total of \$500,000. The Secretary  
21 shall disburse to an institution or consortium the  
22 amount awarded under the grant in such amounts  
23 and at such times during the grant period as the  
24 Secretary determines appropriate.

1       “(e) REPORT.—From the amounts appropriated to  
2 carry out this section, and not later than 3 years after  
3 the date on which the first grant is awarded under sub-  
4 section (a), the Secretary shall submit to Congress a re-  
5 port on the grant program established under subsection  
6 (a), including—

7               “(1) the number of grants awarded;

8               “(2) the institutions of higher education and  
9 consortia that have received grants;

10              “(3) with respect to each such institution of  
11 higher education and consortium—

12                      “(A) the amounts awarded;

13                      “(B) how such institution or consortium  
14 used such amounts;

15                      “(C) a description of the demographics of  
16 student veterans (and spouses or partners and  
17 children of such students) to whom services  
18 were offered as a result of the award, including  
19 students who are women and belong to minority  
20 groups;

21                      “(D) the number of student veterans (and  
22 spouses or partners and children of such stu-  
23 dents) to whom services were offered as a result  
24 of the award, and a description of the services  
25 that were offered and provided; and

1           “(E) data enumerating whether the use of  
2           the amounts awarded helped student veterans  
3           at the institution or consortium toward comple-  
4           tion of a degree, certificate, or credential;

5           “(4) best practices for student veteran success,  
6           identified by reviewing data provided by institutions  
7           and consortia that received a grant under this sec-  
8           tion; and

9           “(5) a determination by the Secretary with re-  
10          spect to whether the grant program under this sec-  
11          tion should be extended or expanded.

12          “(f) DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES  
13 WEBSITE.—Subject to the availability of appropriations  
14 under subsection (h) and not later than 3 years after the  
15 date on which the first grant is awarded under subsection  
16 (a), the Secretary shall develop and implement a website  
17 for Student Veteran Centers at institutions of higher edu-  
18 cation, which details best practices for serving student vet-  
19 erans at institutions of higher education.

20          “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

21           “(1) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—  
22           The term ‘institution of higher education’ has the  
23           meaning given the term in section 101.

24           “(2) STUDENT VETERAN CENTER.—The term  
25           ‘Student Veteran Center’ means a dedicated space

1 on a campus of an institution of higher education  
2 that provides students who are veterans, members of  
3 the Armed Forces serving on active duty, or mem-  
4 bers of a reserve component of the Armed Forces  
5 with the following:

6 “(A) A lounge or meeting space for such  
7 student veterans (and the spouses or partners  
8 and children of such students), and veterans in  
9 the community.

10 “(B) A centralized office for student vet-  
11 eran services that—

12 “(i) is a single point of contact to co-  
13 ordinate comprehensive support services  
14 for student veterans;

15 “(ii) is staffed by trained employees  
16 and volunteers, which includes veterans  
17 and at least one full-time employee or vol-  
18 unteer who is trained as a veterans’ bene-  
19 fits counselor;

20 “(iii) provides student veterans with  
21 assistance relating to—

22 “(I) transitioning from the mili-  
23 tary to student life;

24 “(II) transitioning from the mili-  
25 tary to the civilian workforce;

1 “(III) networking with other stu-  
2 dent veterans and veterans in the  
3 community;

4 “(IV) understanding and obtain-  
5 ing benefits provided by the institu-  
6 tion of higher education, Federal Gov-  
7 ernment, and State for which such  
8 students may be eligible;

9 “(V) understanding how to suc-  
10 ceed in the institution of higher edu-  
11 cation, including by understanding  
12 academic policies, the course selection  
13 process, and institutional policies and  
14 practices related to the transfer of  
15 academic credits; and

16 “(VI) understanding disability-re-  
17 lated rights and protections under the  
18 Americans with Disabilities Act of  
19 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) and  
20 section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act  
21 of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794); and

22 “(iv) provides comprehensive academic  
23 and tutoring services for student veterans,  
24 including peer-to-peer tutoring and aca-  
25 demic mentorship.

1       “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There  
2 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part  
3 such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2024 and  
4 each of the 7 succeeding fiscal years.”.

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