



(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

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

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To reauthorize and improve a grant program to assist institutions of higher education in establishing, maintaining, improving, and operating 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 attend institutions
2 of higher education each year.

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

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

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

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

23 (6) The American Council on Education, which
24 represents more than 1,700 institutions of higher
25 education across the United States, has called hav-

1 ing a dedicated space for veterans on campus “a
2 promising way for colleges and universities to better
3 serve veterans on campus” and a “critical” compo-
4 nent of many colleges’ efforts to serve their veteran
5 students.

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

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

15 (9) The 110th Congress authorized the funding
16 of Veteran Student Centers through the Centers of
17 Excellence for Veteran Student Success under part
18 T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of 1965
19 (20 U.S.C. 1161t). Congress also chose to appro-
20 priate funding for this program for fiscal year 2015
21 under the Consolidated and Further Continuing Ap-
22 propriations Act, 2015 (Public Law 113–235).

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

1 tention, and graduation rates, have helped veteran
2 students feel better connected across campus, and
3 have directly contributed to veteran students' suc-
4 cessful academic outcomes.

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

7 Part T of title VIII of the Higher Education Act of
8 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1161t) is amended to read as follows:

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

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

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

18 “(b) ELIGIBILITY.—

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

24 “(2) CRITERIA.—The Secretary may award a
25 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 veteran
6 students, 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 vet-
10 eran students, 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 veteran students, 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 veteran students, 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 Veteran Student 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 veteran stu-
19 dents 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 veteran students.

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 Veteran
14 Student Center that includes veterans (in-
15 cluding veteran student volunteers and vet-
16 eran students 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 using a portion of the grant re-
23 ceived under this section to develop or
24 maintain a veteran student retention pro-

1 gram carried out by the Veteran Student
2 Center.

3 “(vii) The institution or consortium
4 commits to providing mental health coun-
5 seling to its veteran students (and the
6 spouses or partners and children of such
7 students).

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

11 “(c) USE OF FUNDS.—

12 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An institution or Consor-
13 tium that is awarded a grant under subsection (a)
14 shall use such grant to establish, maintain, improve,
15 or operate a Veteran Student Center.

16 “(2) OTHER ALLOWABLE USES.—An institution
17 or consortium receiving a grant under subsection (a)
18 may use a portion of such grant to carry out sup-
19 portive instruction services for veteran students, in-
20 cluding—

21 “(A) assistance with special admissions
22 and transfer of credit from previous postsec-
23 ondary education or experience; and

24 “(B) any other support services the insti-
25 tution or consortium determines to be necessary

1 to ensure the success of veteran students in
2 achieving education and career goals.

3 “(d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

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

6 “(2) TOTAL AMOUNT OF GRANT AND SCHED-
7 ULE.—Each grant awarded under subsection (a)
8 may not exceed a total of \$500,000. The Secretary
9 shall disburse to an institution or consortium the
10 amount awarded under the grant in such amounts
11 and at such times during the grant period as the
12 Secretary determines appropriate.

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

19 “(1) the number of grants awarded;

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

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

24 “(A) the amounts awarded;

1 “(B) how such institution or consortium
2 used such amounts;

3 “(C) a description of the demographics of
4 veteran students (and spouses or partners and
5 children of such students) to whom services
6 were offered as a result of the award, including
7 students that are women and belong to minority
8 groups;

9 “(D) the number of veteran students (and
10 spouses or partners and children of such stu-
11 dents) to whom services were offered as a result
12 of the award, and a description of the services
13 that were offered and provided; and

14 “(E) data enumerating whether the use of
15 the amounts awarded helped veteran students
16 at the institution or consortium toward comple-
17 tion of a degree, certificate, or credential;

18 “(4) best practices for veteran student success,
19 identified by reviewing data provided by institutions
20 and consortia that received a grant under this sec-
21 tion; and

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

1 “(f) DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION BEST PRACTICES
2 WEBSITE.—Subject to the availability of appropriations
3 under subsection (h) and not later than 3 years after the
4 date on which the first grant is awarded under subsection
5 (a), the Secretary shall develop and implement a website
6 for Veteran Student Centers at institutions of higher edu-
7 cation, which details best practices for serving veteran stu-
8 dents at institutions of higher education.

9 “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

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

13 “(2) VETERAN STUDENT CENTER.—The term
14 ‘Veteran Student Center’ means a dedicated space
15 on a campus of an institution of higher education
16 that provides students who are veterans, members of
17 the Armed Forces serving on active duty, or mem-
18 bers of a reserve component of the Armed Forces
19 with the following:

20 “(A) A lounge or meeting space for such
21 veteran students (and the spouses or partners
22 and children of such students), and veterans in
23 the community.

24 “(B) A centralized office for veteran stu-
25 dent services that—

1 “(i) is a single point of contact to co-
2 ordinate comprehensive support services
3 for veteran students;

4 “(ii) is staffed by trained employees
5 and volunteers, which includes veterans
6 and at least one full-time employee or vol-
7 unteer who is trained as a veterans’ bene-
8 fits counselor;

9 “(iii) provides veteran students with
10 assistance relating to—

11 “(I) transitioning from the mili-
12 tary to student life;

13 “(II) transitioning from the mili-
14 tary to the civilian workforce;

15 “(III) networking with other vet-
16 eran students and veterans in the
17 community;

18 “(IV) understanding and obtain-
19 ing benefits provided by the institu-
20 tion of higher education, Federal Gov-
21 ernment, and State for which such
22 students may be eligible;

23 “(V) understanding how to suc-
24 ceed in the institution of higher edu-
25 cation, including by understanding

1 academic policies, the course selection
2 process, and institutional policies and
3 practices related to the transfer of
4 academic credits; and

5 “(VI) understanding disability-re-
6 lated rights and protections under the
7 Americans with Disabilities Act of
8 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) and
9 section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
10 of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794); and

11 “(iv) provides comprehensive academic
12 and tutoring services for veteran students,
13 including peer-to-peer tutoring and aca-
14 demic mentorship.

15 “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
16 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part
17 such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2022 and
18 each succeeding fiscal year.”.