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(Original Signature of Member)

116TH 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.

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IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Ms. FRANKEL 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  
4 transitioning from the battlefield to the classroom  
5 and 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 priority consideration to institutions or con-  
11 sortia that meet one or more of the following cri-  
12 teria:—

13 “(A) The institution or consortium is lo-  
14 cated in a region or community that has a sig-  
15 nificant population of veterans.

16 “(B) The institution or consortium carries  
17 out programs or activities that assist veterans  
18 in the local community, and the spouses or  
19 partners and children of veteran students.

20 “(C) The institution or consortium part-  
21 ners in its veteran-specific programming with  
22 nonprofit veteran service organizations, local  
23 workforce development organizations, or other  
24 institutions of higher education.

1           “(D) The institution or consortium com-  
2           mits to hiring a staff at the Veteran Student  
3           Center that includes veterans (including veteran  
4           student volunteers and veteran students partici-  
5           pating in a Federal work-study program under  
6           part C of title IV, a work-study program ad-  
7           ministered by the Secretary of Veteran Affairs,  
8           or a State work-study program).

9           “(E) The institution or consortium com-  
10          mits to using a portion of the grant received  
11          under this section to develop or maintain a vet-  
12          eran student retention program carried out by  
13          the Veteran Student Center.

14          “(F) The institution or consortium com-  
15          mits to providing mental health counseling to  
16          its veteran students (and the spouses or part-  
17          ners and children of such students).

18          “(c) USE OF FUNDS.—

19                 “(1) IN GENERAL.—An institution or consor-  
20                 tium that is awarded a grant under subsection (a)  
21                 shall use such grant to establish, maintain, improve,  
22                 or operate a Veteran Student Center.

23                 “(2) OTHER ALLOWABLE USES.—An institution  
24                 or consortium receiving a grant under subsection (a)  
25                 may use a portion of such grant to carry out sup-

1 portive instruction services for veteran students, in-  
2 cluding—

3 “(A) assistance with special admissions  
4 and transfer of credit from previous postsec-  
5 ondary education or experience; and

6 “(B) any other support services the insti-  
7 tution or consortium determines to be necessary  
8 to ensure the success of veteran students in  
9 achieving education and career goals.

10 “(d) AMOUNTS AWARDED.—

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

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

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



1           “(1) the number of grants awarded;

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

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

6                 “(A) the amounts awarded;

7                 “(B) how such institution or consortium  
8 used such amounts;

9                 “(C) a description of the demographics of  
10 veteran students (and spouses or partners and  
11 children of such students) to whom services  
12 were offered as a result of the award;

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

18                 “(E) data enumerating whether the use of  
19 the amounts awarded helped veteran students  
20 at the institution or consortium toward comple-  
21 tion of a degree, certificate, or credential;

22           “(4) best practices for veteran student success,  
23 identified by reviewing data provided by institutions  
24 and consortia that received a grant under this sec-  
25 tion; and

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

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

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

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

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, members of  
20           the Armed Forces serving on active duty, or mem-  
21           bers of a reserve component of the Armed Forces  
22           with the following:

23           “(A) A lounge or meeting space for such  
24           veteran students (and the spouses or partners

1 and children of such students), and veterans in  
2 the community.

3 “(B) A centralized office for veteran stu-  
4 dent services that—

5 “(i) is a single point of contact to co-  
6 ordinate comprehensive support services  
7 for veteran students;

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

13 “(iii) provides veteran students with  
14 assistance relating to—

15 “(I) transitioning from the mili-  
16 tary to student life;

17 “(II) transitioning from the mili-  
18 tary to the civilian workforce;

19 “(III) networking with other vet-  
20 eran students and veterans in the  
21 community;

22 “(IV) understanding and obtain-  
23 ing benefits provided by the institu-  
24 tion of higher education, Federal Gov-

1                   ernment, and State for which such  
2                   students may be eligible;

3                   “(V) understanding how to suc-  
4                   ceed in the institution of higher edu-  
5                   cation, including by understanding  
6                   academic policies, the course selection  
7                   process, and institutional policies and  
8                   practices related to the transfer of  
9                   academic credits; and

10                   “(VI) understanding disability-re-  
11                   lated rights and protections under the  
12                   Americans with Disabilities Act of  
13                   1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) and  
14                   section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act  
15                   of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 794); and

16                   “(iv) provides comprehensive academic  
17                   and tutoring services for veteran students,  
18                   including peer-to-peer tutoring and aca-  
19                   demic mentorship.

20                   “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There  
21                   are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part  
22                   such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2020 and  
23                   each succeeding fiscal year.”.