

111TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 919

To amend title 38, United States Code, to enhance the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit and retain nurses and other critical health care professionals, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 9, 2009

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to enhance the capacity of the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit and retain nurses and other critical health care professionals, 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’ Medical Per-
5 sonnel Recruitment and Retention Act of 2009”.

1 **SEC. 2. ENHANCEMENT OF AUTHORITIES FOR RETENTION**
2 **OF MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS.**

3 (a) SECRETARIAL AUTHORITY TO EXTEND TITLE 38
4 STATUS TO ADDITIONAL POSITIONS.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (3) of section
6 7401 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by
7 striking “and blind rehabilitation outpatient special-
8 ists.” and inserting the following: “blind rehabilita-
9 tion outpatient specialists, and such other classes of
10 health care occupations as the Secretary considers
11 necessary for the recruitment and retention needs of
12 the Department subject to the following require-
13 ments:

14 “(A) Not later than 45 days before the
15 Secretary appoints any personnel for a class of
16 health care occupations that is not specifically
17 listed in this paragraph, the Secretary shall
18 submit to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
19 of the Senate, the Committee on Veterans’ Af-
20 fairs of the House of Representatives, and the
21 Office of Management and Budget notice of
22 such appointment.

23 “(B) Before submitting notice under sub-
24 paragraph (A), the Secretary shall solicit com-
25 ments from any labor organization representing

1 employees in such class and include such com-
2 ments in such notice.”.

3 (2) APPOINTMENT OF NURSE ASSISTANTS.—

4 Such paragraph is further amended by inserting
5 “nurse assistants,” after “licensed practical or voca-
6 tional nurses,”.

7 (b) PROBATIONARY PERIODS FOR NURSES.—Section
8 7403(b) of such title is amended—

9 (1) in paragraph (1), by striking “Appoint-
10 ments” and inserting “Except as otherwise provided
11 in this subsection, appointments”;

12 (2) by redesignating paragraph (2) as para-
13 graph (4); and

14 (3) by inserting after paragraph (1) the fol-
15 lowing new paragraphs:

16 “(2) An appointment of a nurse under this chapter,
17 whether on a full-time basis or a part-time basis, shall be
18 for a probationary period ending upon the completion by
19 the person so appointed of 4,180 hours of work pursuant
20 to such appointment.

21 “(3) An appointment described in subsection (a) on
22 a part-time basis of a person who has previously served
23 on a full-time basis for the probationary period for the
24 position concerned shall be without a probationary pe-
25 riod.”.

1 (c) PROHIBITION ON TEMPORARY PART-TIME NURSE
2 APPOINTMENTS IN EXCESS OF 4,180 HOURS.—Section
3 7405(f)(2) of such title is amended by inserting after
4 “year” the following: “, except that a part-time appoint-
5 ment of a nurse shall be for a period that does not exceed
6 4,180 hours”.

7 (d) WAIVER OF OFFSET FROM PAY FOR CERTAIN
8 REEMPLOYED ANNUITANTS.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 7405 of such title is
10 amended by adding at the end the following:

11 “(g)(1) The Secretary may waive the application of
12 sections 8344 and 8468 of title 5 (relating to annuities
13 and pay on reemployment) or any other similar provision
14 of law under a Government retirement system on a case-
15 by-case basis for an annuitant reemployed on a temporary
16 basis under the authority of subsection (a) in a position
17 described under paragraph (1) of that subsection.

18 “(2) An annuitant for whom a waiver under para-
19 graph (1) is in effect shall not be considered an employee
20 for purposes of any Government retirement system.

21 “(3) An annuitant for whom a waiver under para-
22 graph (1) is in effect shall be subject to the provisions
23 of chapter 71 of title 5 (including all labor authority and
24 labor representative collective bargaining agreements) ap-
25 plicable to the position to which appointed.

1 “(4) In this subsection:

2 “(A) The term ‘annuitant’ means an annuitant
3 under a Government retirement system.

4 “(B) The term ‘employee’ has the meaning
5 under section 2105 of title 5.

6 “(C) The term ‘Government retirement system’
7 means a retirement system established by law for
8 employees of the Government of the United States.”.

9 (2) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made
10 by paragraph (1) shall take effect on the date that
11 is six months after the date of the enactment of this
12 Act, and shall apply to pay periods beginning on or
13 after such effective date.

14 (e) MINIMUM RATE OF BASIC PAY FOR APPOINTEES
15 TO THE OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR
16 HEALTH SET TO LOWEST RATE OF BASIC PAY PAYABLE
17 FOR A SENIOR EXECUTIVE SERVICE POSITION.—

18 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 7404(a) of such title
19 is amended—

20 (A) by striking “The annual” and insert-
21 ing “(1) The annual”;

22 (B) by striking “The pay” and inserting
23 the following:

24 “(2) The pay”;

1 (C) by striking “under the preceding sen-
2 tence” and inserting “under paragraph (1)”;
3 and

4 (D) by adding at the end the following:

5 “(3) The minimum rate of basic pay for a position
6 to which an Executive order applies under paragraph (1)
7 and is not described by paragraph (2) may not be less
8 than the lowest rate of basic pay payable for a Senior Ex-
9 ecutive Service position under section 5382 of title 5.”.

10 (2) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendments made
11 by paragraph (1) shall take effect on the first day
12 of the first pay period beginning after the day that
13 is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this
14 Act.

15 (f) COMPARABILITY PAY PROGRAM FOR APPOINTEES
16 TO THE OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR
17 HEALTH.—Section 7410 of such title is amended—

18 (1) by striking “The Secretary may” and in-
19 serting “(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may”;
20 and

21 (2) by adding at the end the following new sub-
22 section:

23 “(b) COMPARABILITY PAY FOR APPOINTEES TO THE
24 OFFICE OF THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR HEALTH.—(1)
25 The Secretary may authorize the Under Secretary for

1 Health to provide comparability pay of not more than
2 \$100,000 per year to individuals of the Veterans Health
3 Administration appointed under section 7306 of this title
4 who are not physicians or dentists to achieve annual pay
5 levels for such individuals that are comparable with annual
6 pay levels of individuals with similar positions in the pri-
7 vate sector.

8 “(2) Comparability pay under paragraph (1) for an
9 individual is in addition to all other pay, awards, and per-
10 formance bonuses paid to such individual under this title.

11 “(3) Except as provided in paragraph (4), com-
12 parability pay under paragraph (1) for an individual shall
13 be considered basic pay for all purposes, including retire-
14 ment benefits under chapters 83 and 84 of title 5, and
15 other benefits.

16 “(4) Comparability pay under paragraph (1) for an
17 individual shall not be considered basic pay for purposes
18 of adverse actions under subchapter V of this chapter.

19 “(5) Comparability pay under paragraph (1) may not
20 be awarded to an individual in an amount that would re-
21 sult in an aggregate amount of pay (including bonuses and
22 awards) received by such individual in a year under this
23 title that is greater than the annual pay of the Presi-
24 dent.”.

1 (g) SPECIAL INCENTIVE PAY FOR DEPARTMENT
2 PHARMACIST EXECUTIVES.—Section 7410 of such title,
3 as amended by subsection (f), is further amended by add-
4 ing at the end the following new subsection:

5 “(c) SPECIAL INCENTIVE PAY FOR DEPARTMENT
6 PHARMACIST EXECUTIVES.—(1) In order to recruit and
7 retain highly qualified Department pharmacist executives,
8 the Secretary may authorize the Under Secretary for
9 Health to pay special incentive pay of not more than
10 \$40,000 per year to an individual of the Veterans Health
11 Administration who is a pharmacist executive.

12 “(2) In determining whether and how much special
13 pay to provide to such individual, the Under Secretary
14 shall consider the following:

15 “(A) The grade and step of the position of the
16 individual.

17 “(B) The scope and complexity of the position
18 of the individual.

19 “(C) The personal qualifications of the indi-
20 vidual.

21 “(D) The characteristics of the labor market
22 concerned.

23 “(E) Such other factors as the Secretary con-
24 siders appropriate.

1 “(3) Special incentive pay under paragraph (1) for
2 an individual is in addition to all other pay (including
3 basic pay) and allowances to which the individual is enti-
4 tled.

5 “(4) Except as provided in paragraph (5), special in-
6 centive pay under paragraph (1) for an individual shall
7 be considered basic pay for all purposes, including retire-
8 ment benefits under chapters 83 and 84 of title 5, and
9 other benefits.

10 “(5) Special incentive pay under paragraph (1) for
11 an individual shall not be considered basic pay for pur-
12 poses of adverse actions under subchapter V of this chap-
13 ter.

14 “(6) Special incentive pay under paragraph (1) may
15 not be awarded to an individual in an amount that would
16 result in an aggregate amount of pay (including bonuses
17 and awards) received by such individual in a year under
18 this title that is greater than the annual pay of the Presi-
19 dent.”.

20 (h) PAY FOR PHYSICIANS AND DENTISTS.—

21 (1) NON-FOREIGN COST OF LIVING ADJUST-
22 MENT ALLOWANCE.—Section 7431(b) of such title is
23 amended by adding at the end the following:

24 “(5) The non-foreign cost of living adjustment
25 allowance authorized under section 5941 of title 5

1 for physicians and dentists whose pay is set under
2 this section shall be determined as a percentage of
3 base pay only.”.

4 (2) MARKET PAY DETERMINATIONS FOR PHYSI-
5 CIANS AND DENTISTS IN ADMINISTRATIVE OR EXEC-
6 UTIVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.—Section
7 7431(c)(4)(B)(i) of such title is amended by adding
8 at the end the following: “The Secretary may ex-
9 empt physicians and dentists occupying administra-
10 tive or executive leadership positions from the re-
11 quirements of the previous sentence.”.

12 (3) EXCEPTION TO PROHIBITION ON REDUC-
13 TION OF MARKET PAY.—Section 7431(c)(7) of such
14 title is amended by striking “concerned.” and insert-
15 ing “concerned, unless there is a change in board
16 certification or reduction of privileges.”.

17 (i) ADJUSTMENT OF PAY CAP FOR NURSES.—Sec-
18 tion 7451(c)(2) of such title is amended by striking “title
19 5” and inserting “title 5 or in level of GS–15 as prescribed
20 under section 5332 of such title, whichever is greater”.

21 (j) EXEMPTION FOR CERTIFIED REGISTERED NURSE
22 ANESTHETISTS FROM LIMITATION ON AUTHORIZED COM-
23 PETITIVE PAY.—Section 7451(c)(2) of such title is further
24 amended by adding at the end the following new sentence:
25 “The maximum rate of basic pay for a grade for the posi-

1 tion of certified registered nurse anesthetist pursuant to
2 an adjustment under subsection (d) may exceed the max-
3 imum rate otherwise provided in the preceding sentence.”.

4 (k) LOCALITY PAY SCALE COMPUTATIONS.—

5 (1) EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND SUPPORT FOR
6 FACILITY DIRECTORS IN WAGE SURVEYS.—Section
7 7451(d)(3) of such title is amended by adding at the
8 end the following new subparagraph:

9 “(F) The Under Secretary for Health shall provide
10 appropriate education, training, and support to directors
11 of Department health-care facilities in the conduct and use
12 of surveys under this paragraph.”.

13 (2) INFORMATION ON METHODOLOGY USED IN
14 WAGE SURVEYS.—Section 7451(e)(4) of such title is
15 amended—

16 (A) by redesignating subparagraph (D) as
17 subparagraph (E); and

18 (B) by inserting after subparagraph (C)
19 the following new subparagraph (D):

20 “(D) In any case in which the director conducts
21 such a wage survey during the period covered by the
22 report and makes adjustment in rates of basic pay
23 applicable to one or more covered positions at the fa-
24 cility, information on the methodology used in mak-
25 ing such adjustment or adjustments.”.

1 (3) DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION TO PERSONS
2 IN COVERED POSITIONS.—Section 7451(e) of such
3 title is further amended by adding at the end the
4 following new paragraph:

5 “(6)(A) Upon the request of an individual described
6 in subparagraph (B) for a report provided under para-
7 graph (4) with respect to a Department health care facil-
8 ity, the Under Secretary for Health or the director of such
9 facility shall provide to the individual the most current re-
10 port for such facility provided under such paragraph.

11 “(B) An individual described in this subparagraph
12 is—

13 “(i) an individual in a covered position at a De-
14 partment health care facility; or

15 “(ii) a representative of the labor organization
16 representing that individual who is designated by
17 that individual to make the request.”.

18 (l) INCREASED LIMITATION ON SPECIAL PAY FOR
19 NURSE EXECUTIVES.—Section 7452(g)(2) of such title is
20 amended by striking “\$25,000” and inserting
21 “\$100,000”.

22 (m) ELIGIBILITY OF PART-TIME NURSES FOR ADDI-
23 TIONAL NURSE PAY.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 7453 of such title is
25 amended—

1 (A) in subsection (a), by striking “a
2 nurse” and inserting “a full-time nurse or part-
3 time nurse”;

4 (B) in subsection (b)—

5 (i) in the first sentence—

6 (I) by striking “on a tour of
7 duty”;

8 (II) by striking “on such tour”;

9 and

10 (III) by striking “of such tour”

11 and inserting “of such service”; and

12 (ii) in the second sentence, by striking
13 “of such tour” and inserting “of such serv-
14 ice”;

15 (C) in subsection (c)—

16 (i) by striking “on a tour of duty”;

17 and

18 (ii) by striking “on such tour”; and

19 (D) in subsection (e)—

20 (i) in paragraph (1), by striking
21 “eight hours in a day” and inserting
22 “eight consecutive hours”; and

23 (ii) in paragraph (5)(A), by striking
24 “tour of duty” and inserting “period of
25 service”.

1 **“§ 7459. Nurses: special rules for overtime duty**

2 “(a) LIMITATION.—Except as provided in subsection
3 (c), the Secretary may not require a nurse to work more
4 than 40 hours (or 24 hours if such nurse is covered under
5 section 7456) in an administrative work week or more
6 than eight consecutive hours (or 12 hours if such nurse
7 is covered under section 7456 or 7456A).

8 “(b) VOLUNTARY OVERTIME.—(1) A nurse may on
9 a voluntary basis elect to work hours otherwise prohibited
10 by subsection (a).

11 “(2) The refusal of a nurse to work hours prohibited
12 by subsection (a) shall not be grounds to discriminate
13 (within the meaning of section 704(a) of the Civil Rights
14 Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000e–3(a))) against the nurse,
15 to dismiss or discharge the nurse, or to take any other
16 adverse personnel action against the nurse.

17 “(c) OVERTIME UNDER EMERGENCY CIR-
18 CUMSTANCES.—(1) Subject to paragraph (2), the Sec-
19 retary may require a nurse to work hours otherwise pro-
20 hibited by subsection (a) if—

21 “(A) the work is a consequence of an emer-
22 gency that could not have been reasonably antici-
23 pated;

24 “(B) the emergency is non-recurring and is not
25 caused by or aggravated by the inattention of the

1 Secretary or lack of reasonable contingency planning
2 by the Secretary;

3 “(C) the Secretary has exhausted all good faith,
4 reasonable attempts to obtain voluntary workers;

5 “(D) the nurse has critical skills and expertise
6 that are required for the work; and

7 “(E) the work involves work for which the
8 standard of care for a patient assignment requires
9 continuity of care through completion of a case,
10 treatment, or procedure.

11 “(2) A nurse may not be required to work hours
12 under this subsection after the requirement for a direct
13 role by the nurse in responding to medical needs resulting
14 from the emergency ends.

15 “(d) NURSE DEFINED.—In this section, the term
16 ‘nurse’ includes the following:

17 “(1) A registered nurse.

18 “(2) A licensed practical or vocational nurse.

19 “(3) A nurse assistant appointed under this
20 chapter or title 5.

21 “(4) Any other nurse position designated by the
22 Secretary for purposes of this section.”.

23 (2) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sec-
24 tions at the beginning of chapter 74 of such title is

1 amended by inserting after the item relating to sec-
2 tion 7458 the following new item:

“7459. Nurses: special rules for overtime duty.”.

3 (b) WEEKEND DUTY.—Section 7456 of such title is
4 amended—

5 (1) in subsection (a) by striking “regularly
6 scheduled 12-hour tour of duty” and inserting
7 “scheduled 12-hour periods of service”;

8 (2) in subsection (b)—

9 (A) in paragraph (2), by striking “service
10 performed as part of a regularly scheduled 12-
11 hour tour of duty” and inserting “any service
12 performed”; and

13 (B) in paragraph (3)—

14 (i) in subparagraph (A), by striking
15 “regularly scheduled two 12-hour tours of
16 duty” and inserting “scheduled 12-hour
17 period of service”;

18 (ii) in subparagraph (B), by striking
19 “regularly scheduled two 12-hour tour of
20 duty” and inserting “scheduled 12-hour
21 period of service”; and

22 (iii) in subparagraph (C), by striking
23 “regularly scheduled two 12-hour tours of
24 duty” and inserting “scheduled two 12-
25 hour periods of service”;

1 (3) by striking subsection (c); and

2 (4) by redesignating subsection (d) as sub-
3 section (c).

4 (c) ALTERNATE WORK SCHEDULES.—

5 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 7456A(b)(1)(A) of
6 such title is amended by striking “three regularly
7 scheduled” and all that follows through the period at
8 the end and inserting “six regularly scheduled 12-
9 hour periods of service within a pay period shall be
10 considered for all purposes to have worked a full 80-
11 hour pay period.”.

12 (2) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Section
13 7456A(b) of such title is amended—

14 (A) in the subsection heading, by striking
15 “36/40” and inserting “72/80”;

16 (B) in paragraph (2)—

17 (i) in subparagraph (A), by striking
18 “40-hour basic work week” and inserting
19 “80-hour pay period”;

20 (ii) in subparagraph (B), by striking
21 “regularly scheduled 36-hour tour of duty
22 within the work week” and inserting
23 “scheduled 72-hour period of service within
24 the bi-weekly pay period”;

25 (iii) in subparagraph (C)—

1 (I) in clause (i), by striking “reg-
2 ularly scheduled 36-hour tour of duty
3 within an administrative work week”
4 and inserting “scheduled 72-hour pe-
5 riod of service within an administra-
6 tive pay period”;

7 (II) in clause (ii), by striking
8 “regularly scheduled 12-hour tour of
9 duty” and inserting “scheduled 12-
10 hour period of service”; and

11 (III) in clause (iii), by striking
12 “regularly scheduled 36-hour tour of
13 duty work week” and inserting
14 “scheduled 72-hour period of service
15 pay period”; and

16 (iv) in subparagraph (D), by striking
17 “regularly scheduled 12-hour tour of duty”
18 and inserting “scheduled 12-hour period of
19 service”; and

20 (C) in paragraph (3), by striking “regu-
21 larly scheduled 12-hour tour of duty” and in-
22 serting “scheduled 12-hour period of service”.

1 **SEC. 4. IMPROVEMENTS TO CERTAIN EDUCATIONAL AS-**
2 **SISTANCE PROGRAMS.**

3 (a) **REINSTATEMENT OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**
4 **EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.—**

5 (1) **IN GENERAL.—**Section 7618 of title 38,
6 United States Code, is amended by striking “Decem-
7 ber 31, 1998” and inserting “December 31, 2013”.

8 (2) **EXPANSION OF ELIGIBILITY REQUIRE-**
9 **MENTS.—**Paragraph (2) of section 7612(b) of such
10 title is amended by striking “(under section” and all
11 that follows through the period at the end and in-
12 serting the following: “as an appointee under para-
13 graph (1) or (3) of section 7401 of this title.”.

14 (b) **IMPROVEMENTS TO EDUCATION DEBT REDUC-**
15 **TION PROGRAM.—**

16 (1) **INCLUSION OF EMPLOYEE RETENTION AS**
17 **PURPOSE OF PROGRAM.—**Section 7681(a)(2) of such
18 title is amended by inserting “and retention” after
19 “recruitment” the first time it appears.

20 (2) **ELIGIBILITY.—**Section 7682 of such title is
21 amended—

22 (A) in subsection (a)(1), by striking “a re-
23 cently appointed” and inserting “an”; and

24 (B) by striking subsection (c).

25 (3) **MAXIMUM AMOUNTS OF ASSISTANCE.—**Sec-
26 tion 7683(d)(1) of such title is amended—

1 (A) by striking “\$44,000” and inserting
2 “\$60,000”; and

3 (B) by striking “\$10,000” and inserting
4 “\$12,000”.

5 (c) LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM FOR CLINICAL RE-
6 SEARCHERS FROM DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
8 Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of Health
9 and Human Services, may utilize the authorities
10 available in section 487E of the Public Health Serv-
11 ice Act (42 U.S.C. 288–5) for the repayment of the
12 principal and interest of educational loans of appro-
13 priately qualified health professionals who are from
14 disadvantaged backgrounds in order to secure clin-
15 ical research by such professionals for the Veterans
16 Health Administration.

17 (2) LIMITATIONS.—The exercise by the Sec-
18 retary of Veterans Affairs of the authorities referred
19 to in paragraph (1) shall be subject to the conditions
20 and limitations specified in paragraphs (2) and (3)
21 of section 487E(a) of the Public Health Service Act
22 (42 U.S.C. 288–5(2) and (3)).

23 (3) FUNDING.—Amounts for the repayment of
24 principal and interest of educational loans under this
25 subsection shall be derived from amounts available

- 1 to the Secretary of Veterans for the Veterans Health
- 2 Administration for Medical Services.

