

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 681

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the benefits and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to women veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 21, 2017

Mr. TESTER (for himself, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. KAINE, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mrs. MURRAY, Ms. BALDWIN, Mr. NELSON, Ms. HASSAN, and Mr. SCHATZ) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the benefits and services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to women veterans, 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; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Deborah Sampson Act”.

6 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for
7 this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

TITLE I—PEER-TO-PEER ASSISTANCE

- Sec. 101. Pilot program on peer-to-peer assistance for women veterans.
- Sec. 102. Expansion of capabilities of Women Veterans Call Center to include text messaging.
- Sec. 103. Provision of reintegration and readjustment services to veterans and family members in group retreat settings.

TITLE II—LEGAL AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- Sec. 201. Department of Veterans Affairs public-private partnership on legal services for women veterans.
- Sec. 202. Additional amount for Supportive Services for Veteran Families grant program to support organizations that have a focus on providing assistance to women veterans and their families.

TITLE III—NEWBORN CARE

- Sec. 301. Extension of period of eligibility for care for newborn children from the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 302. Source of amounts for medically necessary travel paid by the Department of Veterans Affairs in connection with care for newborn children.

TITLE IV—ELIMINATING BARRIERS TO ACCESS

- Sec. 401. Women Veterans Retrofit Initiative.
- Sec. 402. Staffing of women's health primary care providers at medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 403. Staffing of Women Veteran Program Manager program at medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 404. Additional funding for primary care and emergency care clinicians in Women Veterans Health Care Mini-Residency Program.

TITLE V—DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING

- Sec. 501. Requirement for collection and analysis of data on Department of Veterans Affairs benefits and services and disaggregation of such data by sex and minority status.
- Sec. 502. Report on availability of prosthetics for women veterans from the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Sec. 503. Requirement for Department of Veterans Affairs Internet website to provide information on services available to women veterans.
- Sec. 504. Sense of Congress on changing motto of Department of Veterans Affairs to be more inclusive.

1 **TITLE I—PEER-TO-PEER**
2 **ASSISTANCE**

3 **SEC. 101. PILOT PROGRAM ON PEER-TO-PEER ASSISTANCE**
4 **FOR WOMEN VETERANS.**

5 (a) **PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.**—Commencing not
6 later than January 1, 2018, the Secretary of Veterans Af-
7 fairs shall carry out a pilot program to assess the feasi-
8 bility and advisability of facilitating peer-to-peer assist-
9 ance for women veterans, including those who are sepa-
10 rating or newly separated from service in the Armed
11 Forces.

12 (b) **PEER-TO-PEER ASSISTANCE.**—Peer-to-peer as-
13 sistance under the pilot program shall consist of the fol-
14 lowing:

15 (1) Provision of information about services and
16 benefits provided under laws administered by the
17 Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

18 (2) Employment mentoring.

19 (c) **DURATION.**—The Secretary shall carry out the
20 pilot program during the three-year period beginning on
21 the date of the commencement of the pilot program.

22 (d) **EMPHASIS.**—In carrying out the pilot program,
23 the Secretary shall emphasize facilitating peer-to-peer as-
24 sistance for women described in subsection (a) who suf-
25 fered sexual trauma while serving in the Armed Forces,

1 have post-traumatic stress disorder or suffer from another
2 mental health condition, or are otherwise at risk of becom-
3 ing homeless.

4 (e) OUTREACH.—As part of the pilot program, the
5 Secretary shall conduct a program of outreach to inform
6 women veterans about the pilot program and the assist-
7 ance available under the pilot program.

8 (f) TRAINING.—As part of the pilot program, the
9 Secretary may conduct training for peer counselors and
10 develop training materials for peer counselors.

11 (g) COORDINATION.—

12 (1) WITH GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY OR-
13 GANIZATIONS.—Under the pilot program, the Sec-
14 retary shall facilitate engagement and coordination
15 with such community organizations, State and local
16 governments, institutions of higher education, cham-
17 bers of commerce, local business organizations, orga-
18 nizations that provide legal assistance, and other or-
19 ganizations as the Secretary considers appropriate to
20 facilitate the transition of women described in sub-
21 section (a) into their communities.

22 (2) WITH TRANSITION ASSISTANCE PRO-
23 GRAM.—To the degree practicable, the Secretary
24 shall coordinate facilitation of assistance under the

1 pilot program with the program carried out under
2 section 1144 of title 10, United States Code.

3 (h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
4 are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary such
5 funds as may be necessary to carry out the pilot program.

6 **SEC. 102. EXPANSION OF CAPABILITIES OF WOMEN VET-**
7 **ERANS CALL CENTER TO INCLUDE TEXT MES-**
8 **SAGING.**

9 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall expand the
10 capabilities of the Women Veterans Call Center of the De-
11 partment of Veterans Affairs to include a text messaging
12 capability.

13 **SEC. 103. PROVISION OF REINTEGRATION AND READJUST-**
14 **MENT SERVICES TO VETERANS AND FAMILY**
15 **MEMBERS IN GROUP RETREAT SETTINGS.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1712A of title 38, United
17 States Code, is amended—

18 (1) in subsection (a)(1)(B)—

19 (A) in clause (ii), by redesignating sub-
20 clauses (I) and (II) as items (aa) and (bb);

21 (B) by redesignating clauses (i) and (ii) as
22 subclauses (I) and (II);

23 (C) in the matter preceding subclause (I),
24 as redesignated by subparagraph (B), by strik-

1 ing “Counseling” and inserting “(i) Coun-
2 seling”; and

3 (D) by adding at the end the following new
4 clause:

5 “(ii)(I) Except as provided in subclause (IV), coun-
6 seling furnished to an individual under subparagraph (A)
7 may include reintegration and readjustment services de-
8 scribed in subclause (II) furnished in group retreat set-
9 tings.

10 “(II) Reintegration and readjustment services de-
11 scribed in this subclause are the following:

12 “(aa) Information on reintegration of the indi-
13 vidual into family, employment, and community.

14 “(bb) Financial counseling.

15 “(cc) Occupational counseling.

16 “(dd) Information and counseling on stress re-
17 duction.

18 “(ee) Information and counseling on conflict
19 resolution.

20 “(ff) Such other information and counseling as
21 the Secretary considers appropriate to assist the in-
22 dividual in reintegration into family, employment,
23 and community.

24 “(III) In furnishing reintegration and readjustment
25 services under subclause (I), the Secretary shall offer

1 women the opportunity to receive such services in group
2 retreat settings in which the only participants are women.

3 “(IV) An individual referred to in subparagraph
4 (C)(v) may receive reintegration and readjustment services
5 under subclause (I) only if the individual receives such
6 services with a family member described in subclause (I)
7 or (II) of such subparagraph.”.

8 (b) REQUEST FOR SERVICES.—Subsection (a)(2) of
9 such section is amended—

10 (1) by striking “Upon” and inserting “(A)
11 Upon”;

12 (2) by striking “paragraph (1)(B)” and insert-
13 ing “paragraph (1)(B)(i)”; and

14 (3) by adding at the end the following new sub-
15 paragraph:

16 “(B) Upon the request of an individual described in
17 paragraph (1)(C), the Secretary shall furnish the indi-
18 vidual reintegration and readjustment services in group
19 retreat settings under paragraph (1)(B)(ii).”.

1 **TITLE II—LEGAL AND**
 2 **SUPPORTIVE SERVICES**

3 **SEC. 201. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS PUBLIC-**
 4 **PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP ON LEGAL SERVICES**
 5 **FOR WOMEN VETERANS.**

6 (a) **PARTNERSHIP REQUIRED.**—The Secretary of
 7 Veterans Affairs shall establish a partnership with at least
 8 one nongovernmental organization to provide legal services
 9 to women veterans.

10 (b) **FOCUS.**—The focus of the partnership established
 11 under subsection (a) shall be on the 10 highest unmet
 12 needs of women veterans as set forth in the most recently
 13 completed Community Homelessness Assessment, Local
 14 Education and Networking Groups for Veterans
 15 (CHALENG for Veterans) survey.

16 **SEC. 202. ADDITIONAL AMOUNT FOR SUPPORTIVE SERV-**
 17 **ICES FOR VETERAN FAMILIES GRANT PRO-**
 18 **GRAM TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS THAT**
 19 **HAVE A FOCUS ON PROVIDING ASSISTANCE**
 20 **TO WOMEN VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

21 Section 2044(e) of title 38, United States Code, is
 22 amended—

23 (1) in paragraph (1)—

24 (A) in subparagraph (E), by striking
 25 “2017” and inserting “2016”; and

1 (B) by adding at the end the following new
2 subparagraph:

3 “(F) \$340,000,000 for each of fiscal years
4 2017 and 2018.”; and

5 (2) by adding at the end the following new
6 paragraph:

7 “(4) Not less than \$20,000,000 shall be available
8 under paragraph (1)(F) for the provision of financial as-
9 sistance under subsection (a) to organizations that have
10 a focus on providing assistance to women veterans and
11 their families.”.

12 **TITLE III—NEWBORN CARE**

13 **SEC. 301. EXTENSION OF PERIOD OF ELIGIBILITY FOR** 14 **CARE FOR NEWBORN CHILDREN FROM THE** 15 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

16 Section 1786(a) of title 38, United States Code, is
17 amended, in the matter preceding paragraph (1), by strik-
18 ing “seven days” and inserting “14 days”.

19 **SEC. 302. SOURCE OF AMOUNTS FOR MEDICALLY NEC-** 20 **CESSARY TRAVEL PAID BY THE DEPARTMENT** 21 **OF VETERANS AFFAIRS IN CONNECTION** 22 **WITH CARE FOR NEWBORN CHILDREN.**

23 Section 1786 of title 38, United States Code, is
24 amended by adding at the end the following new sub-
25 section:

1 “(c) SOURCE OF AMOUNTS FOR TRAVEL.—Amounts
2 paid by the Department for medically necessary travel in
3 connection with health care services furnished under this
4 section shall be derived from the Medical Services appro-
5 priations account of the Department.”.

6 **TITLE IV—ELIMINATING**
7 **BARRIERS TO ACCESS**

8 **SEC. 401. WOMEN VETERANS RETROFIT INITIATIVE.**

9 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
10 shall retrofit existing medical facilities of the Department
11 of Veterans Affairs with fixtures, materials, and other out-
12 fitting measures to support the provision of care to women
13 veterans at such facilities.

14 (b) PLAN.—Not later than 180 days after the date
15 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall submit
16 to the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the Senate and
17 the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs of the House of Rep-
18 resentatives a plan to address deficiencies in environment
19 of care for women veterans at medical facilities of the De-
20 partment.

21 (c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
22 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary
23 \$20,000,000 to carry out subsection (a) in addition to
24 amounts otherwise made available to the Secretary for the
25 purposes set forth in such subsection.

1 **SEC. 402. STAFFING OF WOMEN'S HEALTH PRIMARY CARE**
2 **PROVIDERS AT MEDICAL FACILITIES OF THE**
3 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

4 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall ensure that
5 each medical facility of the Department of Veterans Af-
6 fairs has not fewer than one full-time or part-time wom-
7 en's health primary care provider whose duties include, to
8 the extent possible, providing training to other health care
9 providers of the Department on the needs of women vet-
10 erans.

11 **SEC. 403. STAFFING OF WOMEN VETERAN PROGRAM MAN-**
12 **AGER PROGRAM AT MEDICAL CENTERS OF**
13 **THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

14 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
15 shall ensure that the Women Veteran Program Manager
16 program of the Department of Veterans Affairs is sup-
17 ported at each medical center of the Department with a
18 Women Veteran Program Manager and a Women Veteran
19 Program Ombudsman.

20 (b) TRAINING.—The Secretary shall ensure that the
21 staff required under subsection (a) receive the proper
22 training to carry out their duties.

1 **SEC. 404. ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR PRIMARY CARE AND**
 2 **EMERGENCY CARE CLINICIANS IN WOMEN**
 3 **VETERANS HEALTH CARE MINI-RESIDENCY**
 4 **PROGRAM.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be appro-
 6 priated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs \$1,000,000
 7 for each fiscal year for the Women Veterans Health Care
 8 Mini-Residency Program of the Department of Veterans
 9 Affairs to provide opportunities for participation in such
 10 program for primary care and emergency care clinicians.

11 (b) TREATMENT OF AMOUNTS.—The amounts au-
 12 thorized to be appropriated under subsection (a) shall be
 13 in addition to amounts otherwise made available to the
 14 Secretary for the purposes set forth in such subsection.

15 **TITLE V—DATA COLLECTION**
 16 **AND REPORTING**

17 **SEC. 501. REQUIREMENT FOR COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**
 18 **OF DATA ON DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AF-**
 19 **FAIRS BENEFITS AND SERVICES AND**
 20 **DISAGGREGATION OF SUCH DATA BY SEX**
 21 **AND MINORITY STATUS.**

22 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall—

23 (1) collect and analyze data on each program of
 24 the Department of Veterans Affairs that provides a
 25 service or benefit to a veteran, including the pro-

1 gram carried out under section 1144 of title 10,
2 United States Code;

3 (2) disaggregate such data by sex and minority
4 status, when the data lends itself to such
5 disaggregation; and

6 (3) publish the data collected and analyzed
7 under paragraph (1), except for such cases in which
8 the Secretary determines that some portions of the
9 data would undermine the anonymity of a veteran.

10 **SEC. 502. REPORT ON AVAILABILITY OF PROSTHETICS FOR**
11 **WOMEN VETERANS FROM THE DEPARTMENT**
12 **OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

13 Not later than one year after the date of the enact-
14 ment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall
15 submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Sen-
16 ate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House
17 of Representatives a report on the availability from the
18 Department of Veterans Affairs of prosthetics made for
19 women veterans, including an assessment of the avail-
20 ability of such prosthetics at each medical facility of the
21 Department.

1 **SEC. 503. REQUIREMENT FOR DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS**
2 **AFFAIRS INTERNET WEBSITE TO PROVIDE IN-**
3 **FORMATION ON SERVICES AVAILABLE TO**
4 **WOMEN VETERANS.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs
6 shall survey the Internet websites and information re-
7 sources of the Department of Veterans Affairs in effect
8 on the day before the date of the enactment of this Act
9 and publish an Internet website that serves as a central-
10 ized source for the provision to women veterans of infor-
11 mation about the benefits and services available to them
12 under laws administered by the Secretary.

13 (b) ELEMENTS.—The Internet website published
14 under subsection (a) shall provide to women veterans in-
15 formation regarding all of the services available in the dis-
16 trict in which that the veteran is seeking such services,
17 including, with respect to each medical center and commu-
18 nity-based outpatient clinic in the applicable Veterans In-
19 tegrated Service Network—

20 (1) the name and contact information of each
21 women’s health coordinator;

22 (2) a list of appropriate staff for other benefits
23 available from the Veterans Benefits Administration,
24 the National Cemetery Administration, and such
25 other entities as the Secretary considers appropriate;
26 and

1 (3) such other information as the Secretary
2 considers appropriate.

3 (c) UPDATED INFORMATION.—The Secretary shall
4 ensure that the information described in subsection (b)
5 that is published on the Internet website required by sub-
6 section (a) is updated not less frequently than once every
7 90 days.

8 (d) OUTREACH.—In carrying out this section, the
9 Secretary shall ensure that the outreach conducted under
10 section 1720F(i) of title 38, United States Code, includes
11 information regarding the Internet website required by
12 subsection (a).

13 (e) DERIVATION OF FUNDS.—Amounts used by the
14 Secretary to carry out this section shall be derived from
15 amounts made available to the Secretary to publish Inter-
16 net websites of the Department.

17 **SEC. 504. SENSE OF CONGRESS ON CHANGING MOTTO OF**
18 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS TO BE**
19 **MORE INCLUSIVE.**

20 In is the sense of Congress that the Secretary of Vet-
21 erans Affairs should change the motto of the Department
22 of Veterans Affairs to be more inclusive.

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