

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1881

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

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 27, 2021

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

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 for fiscal year 2015
19 under the Consolidated and Further Continuing Ap-
20 propriations Act, 2015 (Public Law 113–235).

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

1 have directly contributed to the successful academic
 2 outcomes of student veterans.

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

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

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

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

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

16 “(b) ELIGIBILITY.—

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

22 “(2) CRITERIA.—The Secretary may award a
 23 grant under subsection (a) to an institution or a
 24 consortium if the institution or consortium meets
 25 each of the following criteria:

1 “(A) The institution or consortium enrolls
2 in undergraduate or graduate courses—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23 “(iii) The institution or consortium
24 carries out programs or activities that as-
25 sist veterans in the local community, and

1 the spouses or partners and children of
2 student veterans.

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

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

18 “(vi) The institution or consortium
19 commits to providing an orientation for
20 student veterans that—

21 “(I) is separate from the new
22 student orientation provided by the in-
23 stitution or consortium; and

24 “(II) provides student veterans
25 with information on the benefits and

1 resources available to such students at
 2 or through the institution or consor-
 3 tium.

4 “(vii) The institution or consortium
 5 commits to using a portion of the grant re-
 6 ceived under this section to develop or
 7 maintain a student veteran retention pro-
 8 gram carried out by the Student Veteran
 9 Center.

10 “(viii) The institution or consortium
 11 commits to providing mental health coun-
 12 seling to its student veterans (and the
 13 spouses or partners and children of such
 14 students).

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

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 Student Veteran 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 student veterans, 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 student veterans 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 student veterans (and spouses or partners and
11 children of such students) to whom services
12 were offered as a result of the award, including
13 students that are women and belong to minority
14 groups;

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

20 “(E) data enumerating whether the use of
21 the amounts awarded helped student veterans
22 at the institution or consortium toward comple-
23 tion of a degree, certificate, or credential;

24 “(4) best practices for student veteran success,
25 identified by reviewing data provided by institutions

1 and consortia that received a grant under this sec-
2 tion; and

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

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

14 “(g) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

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

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

1 “(A) A lounge or meeting space for such
2 student veterans (and the spouses or partners
3 and children of such students), and veterans in
4 the community.

5 “(B) A centralized office for student vet-
6 eran services that—

7 “(i) is a single point of contact to co-
8 ordinate comprehensive support services
9 for student veterans;

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

15 “(iii) provides student veterans with
16 assistance relating to—

17 “(I) transitioning from the mili-
18 tary to student life;

19 “(II) transitioning from the mili-
20 tary to the civilian workforce;

21 “(III) networking with other stu-
22 dent veterans and veterans in the
23 community;

24 “(IV) understanding and obtain-
25 ing benefits provided by the institu-

1 tion of higher education, Federal Gov-
 2 ernment, and State for which such
 3 students may be eligible;

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

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

17 “(iv) provides comprehensive academic
 18 and tutoring services for student veterans,
 19 including peer-to-peer tutoring and aca-
 20 demic mentorship.

21 “(h) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
 22 are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this part
 23 such sums as may be necessary for fiscal year 2022 and
 24 each of the 7 succeeding fiscal years.”.

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