

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2265

To require the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish a veterans visa program to permit veterans who have been removed from the United States to return as immigrants, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 24, 2021

Ms. DUCKWORTH (for herself, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. BLUMENTHAL, Mr. WYDEN, Ms. HIRONO, and Mr. BOOKER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on the Judiciary

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish a veterans visa program to permit veterans who have been removed from the United States to return as immigrants, 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 Visa and Pro-
5 tection Act of 2021”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

1 (1) ARMED FORCES.—The term “Armed
2 Forces” has the meaning given the term “armed
3 forces” in section 101 of title 10, United States
4 Code.

5 (2) CRIME OF VIOLENCE.—The term “crime of
6 violence” means an offense defined in section 16(a)
7 of title 18, United States Code—

8 (A) that is not a purely political offense;
9 and

10 (B) for which a noncitizen has served a
11 term of imprisonment of at least 5 years.

12 (3) ELIGIBLE VETERAN.—

13 (A) IN GENERAL.—The term “eligible vet-
14 eran” means a veteran who—

15 (i) is a noncitizen; and

16 (ii) meets the criteria described in sec-
17 tion 3(e).

18 (B) INCLUSION.—The term “eligible vet-
19 eran” includes a veteran who—

20 (i) was removed from the United
21 States; or

22 (ii) is abroad and is inadmissible
23 under section 212(a) of the Immigration
24 and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182(a)).

1 (4) NONCITIZEN.—The term “noncitizen”
2 means an individual who is not a citizen or national
3 of the United States.

4 (5) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
5 the Secretary of Homeland Security.

6 (6) SERVICE MEMBER.—The term “service
7 member” means an individual who is serving as a
8 member of—

9 (A) a regular or reserve component of the
10 Armed Forces on active duty; or

11 (B) a reserve component of the Armed
12 Forces in an active status.

13 (7) VETERAN.—The term “veteran” has the
14 meaning given the term in section 101 of title 38,
15 United States Code.

16 **SEC. 3. RETURN OF ELIGIBLE VETERANS REMOVED FROM**
17 **THE UNITED STATES; ADJUSTMENT OF STA-**
18 **TUS.**

19 (a) PROGRAM FOR ADMISSION AND ADJUSTMENT OF
20 STATUS.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the
21 enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall establish a pro-
22 gram and an application procedure that allows—

23 (1) eligible veterans outside the United States
24 to be admitted to the United States as aliens law-
25 fully admitted for permanent residence (as defined

1 in section 101(a) of the Immigration and Nationality
2 Act (8 U.S.C. 1101(a)); and

3 (2) eligible veterans in the United States to ad-
4 just status to that of aliens lawfully admitted for
5 permanent residence.

6 (b) VETERANS ORDERED REMOVED.—

7 (1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to noncitizen
8 veterans who are the subjects of final orders of re-
9 moval, including noncitizen veterans who are outside
10 the United States, not later than 180 days after the
11 date of the enactment of this Act, the Attorney Gen-
12 eral shall—

13 (A) reopen the removal proceedings of each
14 such noncitizen veteran; and

15 (B) make a determination with respect to
16 whether each such noncitizen veteran is an eli-
17 gible veteran.

18 (2) RESCISSION OF REMOVAL ORDER.—In the
19 case of a determination under paragraph (1)(B) that
20 a noncitizen veteran is an eligible veteran, the Attor-
21 ney General shall—

22 (A) rescind the order of removal;

23 (B) adjust the status of the eligible veteran
24 to that of an alien lawfully admitted for perma-
25 nent residence; and

1 (C) terminate removal proceedings.

2 (c) VETERANS IN REMOVAL PROCEEDINGS.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—With respect to noncitizen
4 veterans the removal proceedings of whom are pend-
5 ing as of the date of the enactment of this Act, not
6 later than 180 days after the date of the enactment
7 of this Act, the Attorney General shall make a deter-
8 mination with respect to whether each such noncit-
9 izen veteran is an eligible veteran.

10 (2) TERMINATION OF PROCEEDINGS.—In the
11 case of a determination under paragraph (1) that a
12 noncitizen veteran is an eligible veteran, the Attor-
13 ney General shall—

14 (A) adjust the status of the eligible veteran
15 to that of an alien lawfully admitted for perma-
16 nent residence; and

17 (B) terminate removal proceedings.

18 (d) NO NUMERICAL LIMITATIONS.—Nothing in this
19 section or in any other provision of law may be construed
20 to apply a numerical limitation to the number of veterans
21 who may be eligible to receive a benefit under this section.

22 (e) ELIGIBILITY.—

23 (1) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other
24 provision of law, including sections 212 and 237 of
25 the Immigration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1182

1 and 1227), a noncitizen veteran shall be eligible to
2 participate in the program established under sub-
3 section (a) or for adjustment of status under sub-
4 section (b) or (c), as applicable, if the Secretary or
5 the Attorney General, as applicable, determines that
6 the noncitizen veteran—

7 (A) was not removed or ordered removed
8 from the United States based on a conviction
9 for—

10 (i) a crime of violence; or

11 (ii) a crime that endangers the na-
12 tional security of the United States for
13 which the noncitizen veteran has served a
14 term of imprisonment of at least 5 years;
15 and

16 (B) is not inadmissible to, or deportable
17 from, the United States based on a conviction
18 for a crime described in subparagraph (A).

19 (2) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive the ap-
20 plication of paragraph (1)—

21 (A) for humanitarian purposes;

22 (B) to ensure family unity;

23 (C) based on exceptional service in the
24 Armed Forces; or

1 (D) if a waiver is otherwise in the public
2 interest.

3 **SEC. 4. PROTECTING VETERANS AND SERVICE MEMBERS**
4 **FROM REMOVAL.**

5 Notwithstanding any other provision of law, including
6 section 237 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (8
7 U.S.C. 1227), a noncitizen who is a veteran or service
8 member may not be removed from the United States un-
9 less the noncitizen has been convicted for a crime of vio-
10 lence.

11 **SEC. 5. NATURALIZATION THROUGH SERVICE IN THE**
12 **ARMED FORCES.**

13 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subsection (b), a non-
14 citizen who has obtained the status of an alien lawfully
15 admitted for permanent residence pursuant to section 3
16 shall be eligible for naturalization through service in the
17 Armed Forces under sections 328 and 329 of the Immi-
18 gration and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1439 and 1440).

19 (b) SPECIAL RULES.—

20 (1) GOOD MORAL CHARACTER.—In determining
21 whether a noncitizen described in subsection (a) is
22 a person of good moral character, the Secretary
23 shall disregard the one or more grounds on which
24 the noncitizen was—

1 (A) removed or ordered removed from the
2 United States; or

3 (B) rendered inadmissible to, or deportable
4 from, the United States.

5 (2) PERIODS OF ABSENCE.—The Secretary
6 shall disregard any period of absence from the
7 United States of a noncitizen described in subsection
8 (a) due to the noncitizen having been removed from,
9 or being inadmissible to, the United States if the
10 noncitizen satisfies the applicable requirement relat-
11 ing to continuous residence or physical presence.

12 **SEC. 6. ACCESS TO MILITARY BENEFITS.**

13 A noncitizen who has obtained the status of an alien
14 lawfully admitted for permanent residence pursuant to
15 section 3 shall be eligible for all military and veterans ben-
16 efits for which the noncitizen would have been eligible had
17 the noncitizen not been ordered removed or removed from
18 the United States, voluntarily departed the United States,
19 or rendered inadmissible to, or deportable from, the
20 United States, as applicable.

21 **SEC. 7. IMPLEMENTATION.**

22 (a) IDENTIFICATION.—The Secretary shall identify
23 noncitizen service members and veterans at risk of re-
24 moval from the United States by—

1 (1) before initiating a removal proceeding
2 against a noncitizen, asking the noncitizen whether
3 he or she is serving, or has served, as a member
4 of—

5 (A) a regular or reserve component of the
6 Armed Forces on active duty; or

7 (B) a reserve component of the Armed
8 Forces in an active status;

9 (2) requiring U.S. Immigration and Customs
10 Enforcement personnel to seek supervisory approval
11 before initiating a removal proceeding against a
12 service member or veteran; and

13 (3) keeping records of any service member or
14 veteran who has been—

15 (A) the subject of a removal proceeding;

16 (B) detained by the Director of U.S. Immi-
17 gration and Customs Enforcement; or

18 (C) removed from the United States.

19 (b) RECORD ANNOTATION.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—In the case of a noncitizen
21 service member or veteran identified under sub-
22 section (a), the Secretary shall annotate all immigra-
23 tion and naturalization records of the Department of
24 Homeland Security relating to the noncitizen—

1 (A) to reflect that the noncitizen is a serv-
2 ice member or veteran; and

3 (B) to afford an opportunity to track the
4 outcomes for the noncitizen.

5 (2) CONTENTS OF ANNOTATION.—Each annota-
6 tion under paragraph (1) shall include—

7 (A) the branch of military service in which
8 the noncitizen is serving or has served;

9 (B) whether the noncitizen is serving, or
10 has served, during a period of military hos-
11 tilities described in section 329 of the Immigra-
12 tion and Nationality Act (8 U.S.C. 1440);

13 (C) the immigration status of the noncit-
14 izen on the date of enlistment;

15 (D) whether the noncitizen is serving hon-
16 orably or was separated under honorable condi-
17 tions;

18 (E) the ground on which removal of the
19 noncitizen from the United States was sought;
20 and

21 (F) in the case of a noncitizen the removal
22 proceedings of whom were initiated on the basis
23 of a criminal conviction, the crime for which the
24 noncitizen was convicted.

1 **SEC. 8. REGULATIONS.**

2 Not later than 90 days after the date of the enact-
3 ment of this Act, the Secretary shall promulgate regula-
4 tions to implement this Act.

○