

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 2916

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide hospital care and medical services to veterans in the Freely Associated States of the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia, and to conduct a study on the feasibility and advisability of establishing regional offices, suboffices, contact units, or other subordinate offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs in the Freely Associated States to provide such care and services, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 22, 2019

Ms. GABBARD (for herself, Mrs. RADEWAGEN, Mr. CASE, Mr. SAN NICOLAS, and Mr. YOUNG) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program to provide hospital care and medical services to veterans in the Freely Associated States of the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia, and to conduct a study on the feasibility and advisability of establishing regional offices, suboffices, contact units, or other subordinate offices of the Department of Veterans Affairs in the Freely Associated States to provide such care and services, 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 “Compact of Free Asso-
5 ciation Veterans Review Act of 2019” or the “COFA Vet-
6 erans Review Act of 2019”.

7 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

8 In this Act:

9 (1) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CON-
10 GRESS.—The term “appropriate committees of Con-
11 gress” means—

12 (A) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
13 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
14 Senate; and

15 (B) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
16 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
17 House of Representatives.

18 (2) DEPARTMENT.—The term “Department”
19 means the Department of Veterans Affairs.

20 (3) FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES.—The term
21 “Freely Associated States” means the Republic of
22 Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the
23 Federated States of Micronesia, which have each en-
24 tered into a Compact of Free Association with the
25 United States.

1 (4) HOSPITAL CARE; MEDICAL SERVICES.—The
2 terms “hospital care” and “medical services” have
3 the meanings given those terms in section 1701 of
4 title 38, United States Code.

5 (5) PATIENT ALIGNED CARE TEAM.—The term
6 “patient aligned care team” means a team of health
7 care professionals of the Department that provides
8 comprehensive primary care in partnership with the
9 patient and manages and coordinates comprehensive
10 health care services consistent with agreed-upon
11 goals of care.

12 (6) PROJECT ECHO EDUCATION AND TRAIN-
13 ING.—The term “Project ECHO education and
14 training” means education and training provided
15 under the Project Extension for Community Health
16 Outcomes.

17 (7) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means
18 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

19 (8) SERVICE-CONNECTED; NON-SERVICE-CON-
20 NECTED.—The terms “service-connected” and “non-
21 service-connected” have the meanings given those
22 terms in section 101 of title 38, United States Code.

23 (9) VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATION.—The
24 term “veterans service organization” means any or-
25 ganization recognized by the Secretary for the rep-

1 resentation of veterans under section 5902 of title
2 38, United States Code.

3 **SEC. 3. PILOT PROGRAM ON PROVIDING HOSPITAL CARE**
4 **AND MEDICAL SERVICES TO VETERANS RE-**
5 **SIDING IN THE FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES.**

6 (a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—Commencing not
7 later than January 1, 2020, the Secretary shall carry out
8 a pilot program to provide hospital care, medical services,
9 and other related services to veterans residing in the Free-
10 ly Associated States.

11 (b) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out the
12 pilot program required by subsection (a) during the three-
13 year period beginning on the date of the commencement
14 of the pilot program.

15 (c) SERVICES PROVIDED.—In carrying out the pilot
16 program required by subsection (a), the Secretary shall
17 ensure that the pilot program—

18 (1) emphasizes the use of telehealth;

19 (2) provides Project ECHO education and
20 training to employees of the Department responsible
21 for carrying out the pilot program;

22 (3) includes the use of primary and specialty
23 care provided by patient aligned care teams and spe-
24 cialty care providers; and

1 (4) includes the provision of compensation and
2 pension medical examinations.

3 (d) OUTREACH PROGRAM.—As part of the pilot pro-
4 gram required by subsection (a), the Secretary shall con-
5 duct a program of outreach to inform veterans in the
6 Freely Associated States about the pilot program and the
7 services available under the pilot program.

8 (e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
9 are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary such
10 funds as may be necessary to carry out the pilot program.

11 **SEC. 4. STUDY ON PROVIDING HOSPITAL CARE AND MED-**
12 **ICAL SERVICES TO VETERANS RESIDING IN**
13 **THE FREELY ASSOCIATED STATES.**

14 (a) STUDY REQUIRED.—

15 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall conduct
16 a study on the feasibility and advisability of estab-
17 lishing one or more regional offices, suboffices, con-
18 tact units, or other subordinate offices of the De-
19 partment in the remote Pacific islands, including the
20 Freely Associated States, to provide hospital care
21 and medical services to veterans residing in the re-
22 mote Pacific islands, including the Freely Associated
23 States.

1 (2) CONSIDERATIONS AND ANALYSIS.—In con-
2 ducting the study required by paragraph (1), the
3 Secretary shall consider and analyze the following:

4 (A) The results of the pilot program re-
5 quired by section 3(a).

6 (B) The ability of the Department to pro-
7 vide hospital care and medical services to vet-
8 erans residing or traveling outside the United
9 States, including veterans residing in the Freely
10 Associated States.

11 (C) The feasibility, efficacy, and advis-
12 ability of building clinics or leasing space on
13 embassy compounds or in consulate facilities of
14 the United States in the Freely Associated
15 States or insular areas for the purposes of pro-
16 viding hospital care and medical services to vet-
17 erans residing or traveling outside the United
18 States, including veterans residing in the Freely
19 Associated States.

20 (D) The feasibility and advisability of pro-
21 viding services, such as telehealth, Project
22 ECHO education and training, primary and
23 specialty care provided by patient aligned care
24 teams and specialty care providers, and com-
25 pensation and pension medical examinations, to

1 veterans residing in the Freely Associated
2 States.

3 (E) Updates to census data of the Depart-
4 ment on the number of veterans residing in the
5 Freely Associated States to determine whether
6 such data supports the establishment of a per-
7 manent patient aligned care team of the De-
8 partment based in the Freely Associated States.

9 (F) With respect to the United States and
10 the Freely Associated States, the data stand-
11 ards for—

12 (i) patient medical record information;

13 and

14 (ii) the electronic interchange of such
15 information.

16 (G) The feasibility and advisability of pro-
17 viding hospital care and medical services to vet-
18 erans residing in the Freely Associated States
19 for non-service-connected disabilities.

20 (H) The feasibility and advisability of pro-
21 viding continuity of care to veterans for service-
22 connected disabilities that cannot be treated by
23 the Department within a regional office, sub-
24 office, contact unit, or other subordinate office

1 of the Department in the remote Pacific is-
2 lands, including the Freely Associated States.

3 (I) Such other matters as the Secretary
4 considers appropriate.

5 (3) COOPERATION AND CONSULTATION.—The
6 Secretary shall conduct the study required by para-
7 graph (1)—

8 (A) in cooperation with—

9 (i) the Secretary of Defense;

10 (ii) the Secretary of Health and
11 Human Services;

12 (iii) the Secretary of the Interior;

13 (iv) the Secretary of State; and

14 (v) such other heads of Federal agen-
15 cies as may be interested in the study; and

16 (B) in consultation with—

17 (i) such representatives of State and
18 local governments as the Secretary deter-
19 mines may be interested in the study;

20 (ii) each government of the Freely As-
21 sociated States;

22 (iii) veterans service organizations;

23 (iv) such nongovernmental organiza-
24 tions as the Secretary considers appro-
25 priate; and

1 (v) the public.

2 (b) REPORT REQUIRED.—

3 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 270 days
4 after the date on which the pilot program required
5 by section 3(a) terminates, the Secretary shall sub-
6 mit to the appropriate committees of Congress a re-
7 port on the findings of the Secretary with respect to
8 the study required by subsection (a)(1).

9 (2) CONTENTS.—The report submitted under
10 paragraph (1) shall include the following:

11 (A) A description of the processes required
12 for the Secretary to establish one or more re-
13 gional offices, suboffices, contact units, or other
14 subordinate offices in the Freely Associated
15 States.

16 (B) The number of veterans expected to
17 receive hospital care and medical services pro-
18 vided under laws administered by the Secretary
19 in the Freely Associated States.

20 (C) A resource management plan for the
21 Department to provide hospital care and med-
22 ical services in the Freely Associated States, in-
23 cluding an assessment of the effect that such
24 provision would have on the Department of Vet-

1 erans Affairs Pacific Islands Health Care Sys-
2 tem.

3 (D) An explanation of the guidelines that
4 the Department will use to provide hospital care
5 and medical services under laws administered
6 by the Secretary in the Freely Associated
7 States, including an explanation of benefits for
8 service-connected and non-service-connected dis-
9 abilities.

10 (E) An explanation of how the Department
11 expects to provide continuity of care to veterans
12 for service-connected disabilities that cannot be
13 treated within a regional office, suboffice, con-
14 tact unit, or other subordinate office in the
15 Freely Associated States, including how the De-
16 partment plans to communicate with such vet-
17 erans regarding their continuity of care.

18 (F) An assessment of the budgetary re-
19 sources required to establish and provide hos-
20 pital care and medical services to veterans in
21 the Freely Associated States during the 10-year
22 period beginning on the date of the submittal of
23 the report.

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