

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 5324

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a pilot program on information sharing between the Department of Veterans Affairs and designated relatives and friends of veterans regarding the assistance and benefits available to the veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DECEMBER 5, 2019

Mr. PETERS (for himself, Mr. BANKS, Mrs. DAVIS of California, and Mr. CISNEROS) 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 on information sharing between the Department of Veterans Affairs and designated relatives and friends of veterans regarding the assistance and benefits available to the 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.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Sergeant Daniel
5 Somers Veterans Network of Support Act of 2019”.

1 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM ON INFORMATION SHARING BE-**
2 **TWEEN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
3 **AND DESIGNATED RELATIVES AND FRIENDS**
4 **OF VETERANS REGARDING THE ASSISTANCE**
5 **AND BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO THE VET-**
6 **ERANS.**

7 (a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
9 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
10 retary of Veterans Affairs shall commence carrying
11 out a pilot program—

12 (A) to encourage members of the Armed
13 Forces who are transitioning from service in the
14 Armed Forces to civilian life, before separating
15 from such service, to designate up to 10 per-
16 sons to whom information regarding the assist-
17 ance and benefits available to the veterans
18 under laws administered by the Secretary shall
19 be disseminated using the contact information
20 obtained under paragraph (7); and

21 (B) provides such persons, within 30 days
22 after the date on which such persons are des-
23 ignated under subparagraph (A), the option to
24 elect to receive such information.

25 (2) DURATION.—The Secretary shall carry out
26 the pilot program during a period beginning on the

1 date of the commencement of the pilot program that
2 is not less than two years.

3 (3) DISSEMINATION.—The Secretary shall dis-
4 seminate information described in paragraph (1)(A)
5 under the pilot program no less than quarterly.

6 (4) TYPES OF INFORMATION.—The types of in-
7 formation to be disseminated under the pilot pro-
8 gram to persons who elect to receive such informa-
9 tion shall include information regarding the fol-
10 lowing:

11 (A) Services and benefits offered to vet-
12 erans and their family members by the Depart-
13 ment of Veterans Affairs.

14 (B) Challenges and stresses that might ac-
15 company transitioning from service in the
16 Armed Forces to civilian life.

17 (C) Services available to veterans and their
18 family members to cope with the experiences
19 and challenges of service in the Armed Forces
20 and transition from such service to civilian life.

21 (D) Services available through community
22 partner organizations to support veterans and
23 their family members.

1 (E) Services available through Federal,
2 State, and local government agencies to support
3 veterans and their family members.

4 (F) The environmental health registry pro-
5 gram, health and wellness programs, and re-
6 sources for preventing and managing diseases
7 and illnesses.

8 (G) A toll-free telephone number through
9 which such persons who elect to receive infor-
10 mation under the pilot program may request in-
11 formation regarding the program.

12 (H) Such other matters as the Secretary,
13 in consultation with members of the Armed
14 Forces and such persons who elect to receive in-
15 formation under the pilot program, determines
16 to be appropriate.

17 (5) PRIVACY OF INFORMATION.—In carrying
18 out the pilot program, the Secretary may not dis-
19 seminate information under paragraph (4) in viola-
20 tion of laws and regulations pertaining to the pri-
21 vacy of members of the Armed Forces, including re-
22 quirements pursuant to—

23 (A) section 552a of title 5, United States
24 Code; and

1 (B) the Health Insurance Portability and
2 Accountability Act of 1996 (Public Law 104–
3 191).

4 (6) NOTICE AND MODIFICATIONS.—In carrying
5 out the pilot program, the Secretary shall, with re-
6 spect to a veteran—

7 (A) ensure that such veteran is notified of
8 the ability to modify designations made by such
9 veteran under paragraph (1)(A); and

10 (B) upon the request of a veteran, author-
11 ize such veteran to modify such designations at
12 any time.

13 (7) CONTACT INFORMATION.—In making a des-
14 igation under the pilot program, a veteran shall
15 provide necessary contact information, specifically
16 including an email address, to facilitate the dissemi-
17 nation of information regarding the assistance and
18 benefits available to the veteran under laws adminis-
19 tered by the Secretary.

20 (8) OPT-IN AND OPT-OUT OF PILOT PRO-
21 GRAM.—

22 (A) OPT-IN BY MEMBERS.—A veteran may
23 participate in the pilot program only if the vet-
24 eran voluntarily elects to participate in the pro-
25 gram. A veteran seeking to make such an elec-

tion shall make such election in a manner, and by including such information, as the Secretary shall specify for purposes of the pilot program.

(B) OPT-IN BY DESIGNATED RECIPIENTS.—A person designated pursuant to paragraph (1)(A) may receive information under the pilot program only if the person makes the election described in paragraph (1)(B).

(C) OPT-OUT.—In carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall, with respect to a person who has elected to receive information under such pilot program, cease disseminating such information to that person upon request of such person.

(b) SURVEY AND REPORT ON PILOT PROGRAM.—

(1) SURVEY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the commencement of the pilot program and not less frequently than once each year thereafter for the duration of the pilot program, the Secretary shall administer a survey to persons who elected to receive information under the pilot program for the purpose of receiving feedback regarding the quality of information disseminated under this section.

1 (B) ELEMENTS.—Each survey conducted
2 under subparagraph (A) shall include solicita-
3 tion of the following:

4 (i) Feedback on the following:

5 (I) The nature of information
6 disseminated under the pilot program.

7 (II) Satisfaction with the pilot
8 program.

9 (III) The utility of the pilot pro-
10 gram.

11 (IV) Overall pilot program suc-
12 cesses and challenges.

13 (ii) Recommendations for improving
14 the pilot program.

15 (iii) Reasons for opting in or out of
16 the pilot program.

17 (iv) Such other feedback or matters as
18 the Secretary considers appropriate.

19 (2) REPORT.—

20 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three
21 years after the date on which the pilot program
22 commences, the Secretary shall submit to the
23 Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate
24 and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the

1 House of Representatives a final report on the
2 pilot program.

3 (B) CONTENTS.—The report submitted
4 under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-
5 lowing:

6 (i) The results of the survey adminis-
7 tered under paragraph (1).

8 (ii) The number of participants en-
9 rolled in the pilot program who are vet-
10 erans.

11 (iii) The number of persons des-
12 ignated under subsection (a)(1)(A).

13 (iv) The number of such persons who
14 opted in or out of the pilot program under
15 subsection (a)(8).

16 (v) The average period such persons
17 remained in the pilot program.

18 (vi) An assessment of the feasibility
19 and advisability of making the pilot pro-
20 gram permanent.

21 (vii) Identification of legislative or ad-
22 ministrative action that may be necessary
23 if the pilot program is made permanent.

1 (viii) A plan to expand the pilot pro-
2 gram if the pilot program is made perma-
3 nent.

4 (ix) If the Secretary finds under
5 clause (vi) that making the pilot program
6 permanent is not feasible or advisable, a
7 justification for such finding.

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