

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 946

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire additional Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists to provide treatment court services to justice-involved veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 26, 2017

Mr. FLAKE (for himself, Mr. MCCAIN, Mr. HATCH, Mr. CORNYN, Mr. LEE, Mr. TILLIS, Ms. MURKOWSKI, Mr. TESTER, and Mr. MANCHIN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to hire additional Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists to provide treatment court services to justice-involved 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 “Veterans Treatment
5 Court Improvement Act of 2017”.

1 **SEC. 2. HIRING BY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
2 **OF ADDITIONAL VETERANS JUSTICE OUT-**
3 **REACH SPECIALISTS.**

4 (a) HIRING OF ADDITIONAL VETERANS JUSTICE
5 OUTREACH SPECIALISTS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
7 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
8 retary of Veterans Affairs shall hire not fewer than
9 50 Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists and place
10 each such Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist at
11 an eligible Department of Veterans Affairs medical
12 center in accordance with this section.

13 (2) REQUIREMENTS.—The Secretary shall en-
14 sure that each Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist
15 employed under paragraph (1)—

16 (A) serves, either exclusively or in addition
17 to other duties, as part of a justice team in a
18 veterans treatment court or other veteran-foc-
19 cused court; and

20 (B) otherwise meets Department hiring
21 guidelines for Veterans Justice Outreach Spe-
22 cialists.

23 (3) SUPPLEMENT NOT SUPPLANT.—The Sec-
24 retary shall ensure that the total number of Vet-
25 erans Justice Outreach Specialists employed by the
26 Department is not less than the sum of—

1 (A) the total number of Veterans Justice
2 Outreach Specialists that were employed by the
3 Department on the day before the date of the
4 enactment of this Act; and

5 (B) the number of Veterans Justice Out-
6 reach Specialists set forth in paragraph (1).

7 (b) ELIGIBLE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
8 MEDICAL CENTERS.—For purposes of this section, an eli-
9 gible Department of Veterans Affairs medical center is
10 any Department of Veterans Affairs medical center that—

11 (1) complies with all Department guidelines and
12 regulations for placement of a Veterans Justice Out-
13 reach Specialist;

14 (2) works within a local criminal justice system
15 with justice-involved veterans;

16 (3) maintains an affiliation with one or more
17 veterans treatment courts or other veteran-focused
18 courts; and

19 (4) either—

20 (A) routinely provides Veterans Justice
21 Outreach Specialists to serve as part of a jus-
22 tice team in a veterans treatment court or other
23 veteran-focused court; or

24 (B) establishes a plan that is approved by
25 the Secretary to provide Veterans Justice Out-

1 reach Specialists employed under subsection
2 (a)(1) to serve as part of a justice team in a
3 veterans treatment court or other veteran-foc-
4 cused court.

5 (c) PLACEMENT PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall
6 prioritize the placement of Veterans Justice Outreach Spe-
7 cialists employed under subsection (a)(1) at eligible De-
8 partment of Veterans Affairs medical centers that have
9 or intend to establish an affiliation, for the purpose of car-
10 rying out the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, with
11 a veterans treatment court, or other veteran-focused court,
12 that—

13 (1) was established on or after the date of the
14 enactment of this Act; or

15 (2)(A) was established before the date of the
16 enactment of this Act; and

17 (B) is not fully staffed with Veterans Justice
18 Outreach Specialists.

19 (d) REPORTS.—

20 (1) PERIODIC REPORTS BY SECRETARY OF VET-
21 ERANS AFFAIRS.—

22 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
23 after the date of the enactment of this Act and
24 not less frequently than once every year there-
25 after, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall

1 submit to Congress a report on the implementa-
2 tion of this section and its effect on the Vet-
3 erans Justice Outreach Program.

4 (B) CONTENTS.—Each report submitted
5 under paragraph (1) shall include the following:

6 (i) The status of the efforts of the
7 Secretary to hire Veterans Justice Out-
8 reach Specialists pursuant to subsection
9 (a)(1), including the total number of Vet-
10 erans Justice Outreach Specialists hired by
11 the Secretary pursuant to such subsection
12 and the number that the Secretary expects
13 to hire pursuant to such subsection.

14 (ii) The total number of Veterans
15 Justice Outreach Specialists assigned to
16 each Department of Veterans Affairs med-
17 ical center that participates in the Vet-
18 erans Justice Outreach Program, including
19 the number of Veterans Justice Outreach
20 Specialists hired under subsection (a)(1)
21 disaggregated by Department of Veterans
22 Affairs medical center.

23 (iii) The total number of eligible De-
24 partment of Veterans Affairs medical cen-
25 ters that sought placement of a Veterans

Justice Outreach Specialist under subsection (a)(1), how many Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists each such center sought, and how many of such medical centers received no placement of a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist under subsection (a)(1).

(iv) The total number of justice-involved veterans who were served or are expected to be served by a Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist hired under subsection (a)(1).

(2) REPORT BY COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than two years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General of the United States shall submit to Congress a report on the implementation of this section and the effectiveness of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

(B) CONTENTS.—The report required by subparagraph (A) shall include the following:

(i) An assessment of whether the Secretary has fulfilled the Secretary's obligations under this section.

(ii) The number of veterans who are served by Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists hired under subsection (a)(1), disaggregated by demographics (including discharge status).

(iii) An identification of any subgroups of veterans who underutilize services provided under laws administered by the Secretary, including an assessment of whether these veterans have access to Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists under the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

(iv) Such recommendations as the Comptroller General may have for the Secretary to improve the effectiveness of the Veterans Justice Outreach Program.

(e) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out subsection (a) \$5,500,000 for each of fiscal years 2017 through 2027.

(2) IDENTIFICATION OF OFFSETS.—The Secretary shall submit to Congress a report that identifies such legislative or administrative actions as the Secretary determines will result in a reduction in ex-

penditures by the Department of Veterans Affairs that is equal to or greater than the amounts authorized to be appropriated by paragraph (1).

(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) JUSTICE TEAM.—The term “justice team” means the group of individuals, which may include a judge, court coordinator, prosecutor, public defender, treatment provider, probation or other law enforcement officer, program mentor, and Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist, who assist justice-involved veterans in a veterans treatment court or other veteran-focused court.

(2) JUSTICE-INVOLVED VETERAN.—The term “justice-involved veteran” means a veteran with active, ongoing, or recent contact with some component of a local criminal justice system.

(3) LOCAL CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM.—The term “local criminal justice system” means law enforcement, jails, prisons, and State and local courts.

(4) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH PROGRAM.—The term “Veterans Justice Outreach Program” means the program through which the Department of Veterans Affairs identifies justice-involved veterans and provides such veterans with access to Department services.

1 (5) VETERANS JUSTICE OUTREACH SPE-
2 CIALIST.—The term “Veterans Justice Outreach
3 Specialist” means an employee of the Department of
4 Veterans Affairs who serves as a liaison between the
5 Department and the local criminal justice system on
6 behalf of a justice-involved veteran.

7 (6) VETERANS TREATMENT COURT.—The term
8 “veterans treatment court” means a State or local
9 court that is participating in the veterans treatment
10 court program (as defined in section 2991(i)(1) of
11 the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of
12 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3797aa(i)(1))).

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