

Calendar No. 414

116TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 2864

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 SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 14, 2019

Ms. SINEMA (for herself, Mr. TILLIS, Mrs. BLACKBURN, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. DAINES, and Mrs. LOEFFLER) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

FEBRUARY 5, 2020

Reported by Mr. MORAN, with an amendment

[Strike out all after the enacting clause and insert the part printed in *italic*]

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,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

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

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

10 ~~(a)~~ **PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—**

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

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

24 ~~(B)~~ provides such persons, within 30 days
25 after the date on which such persons are des-

1 ignated under subparagraph (A), the option to
2 elect to receive such information.

3 ~~(2) DURATION.~~—The Secretary shall carry out
4 the pilot program during a period beginning on the
5 date of the commencement of the pilot program that
6 is not less than two years.

7 ~~(3) DISSEMINATION.~~—The Secretary shall dis-
8 seminate information described in paragraph (1)(A)
9 under the pilot program on a regular basis.

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

15 ~~(A)~~ Services and benefits offered to vet-
16 erans and their family members by the Depart-
17 ment of Veterans Affairs.

18 ~~(B)~~ Challenges and stresses that might ac-
19 company transitioning from service in the
20 Armed Forces to civilian life.

21 ~~(C)~~ Services available to veterans and their
22 family members to cope with the experiences
23 and challenges of service in the Armed Forces
24 and transition from such service to civilian life.

1 (D) Services available through community
2 partner organizations to support veterans and
3 their family members.

4 (E) Services available through Federal,
5 State, and local government agencies to support
6 veterans and their family members.

7 (F) The environmental health registry pro-
8 gram, health and wellness programs, and re-
9 sources for preventing and managing diseases
10 and illnesses.

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

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

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

1 (A) section 552a of title 5, United States
2 Code; and

3 (B) the Health Insurance Portability and
4 Accountability Act of 1996 (Public Law 104–
5 191).

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

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

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

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

22 (8) OPT-IN AND OPT-OUT OF PILOT PRO-
23 GRAM.—

24 (A) OPT-IN BY MEMBERS.—A veteran may
25 participate in the pilot program only if the vet-

1 eran voluntarily elects to participate in the pro-
 2 gram. A veteran seeking to make such an elec-
 3 tion shall make such election in a manner, and
 4 by including such information, as the Secretary
 5 shall specify for purposes of the pilot program.

6 ~~(B) OPT-IN BY DESIGNATED RECIPI-~~
 7 ~~ENTS.—~~A person designated pursuant to para-
 8 graph (1)(A) may receive information under the
 9 pilot program only if the person makes the elec-
 10 tion described in paragraph (1)(B).

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

17 (b) SURVEY AND REPORT ON PILOT PROGRAM.—

18 ~~(1) SURVEY.—~~

19 ~~(A) IN GENERAL.—~~Not later than one year
 20 after the date of the commencement of the pilot
 21 program and not less frequently than once each
 22 year thereafter for the duration of the pilot pro-
 23 gram, the Secretary shall administer a survey
 24 to persons who elected to receive information
 25 under the pilot program for the purpose of re-

1 ceiving feedback regarding the quality of infor-
2 mation disseminated under this section.

3 ~~(B) ELEMENTS.—~~Each survey conducted
4 under subparagraph (A) shall include sollicita-
5 tion of the following:

6 (i) Feedback on the following:

7 (I) The nature of information
8 disseminated under the pilot program.

9 (II) Satisfaction with the pilot
10 program.

11 (III) The utility of the pilot pro-
12 gram.

13 (IV) Overall pilot program suc-
14 cesses and challenges.

15 (ii) Recommendations for improving
16 the pilot program.

17 (iii) Reasons for opting in or out of
18 the pilot program.

19 (iv) Such other feedback or matters as
20 the Secretary considers appropriate.

21 ~~(2) REPORT.—~~

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

1 and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the
2 House of Representatives a final report on the
3 pilot program.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 (vii) Identification of legislative or ad-
23 ministrative action that may be necessary
24 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.

8 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

9 *This Act may be cited as the “Sergeant Daniel Somers*
 10 *Veterans Network of Support Act of 2019”.*

11 **SEC. 2. PILOT PROGRAM ON INFORMATION SHARING BE-**
 12 **TWEEN DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**
 13 **AND DESIGNATED RELATIVES AND FRIENDS**
 14 **OF VETERANS REGARDING THE ASSISTANCE**
 15 **AND BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO THE VET-**
 16 **ERANS.**

17 *(a) PILOT PROGRAM REQUIRED.—*

18 *(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after*
 19 *the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of*
 20 *Veterans Affairs shall commence carrying out a pilot*
 21 *program—*

22 *(A) to encourage members of the Armed*
 23 *Forces who are transitioning from service in the*
 24 *Armed Forces to civilian life, before separating*
 25 *from such service, to designate up to 10 persons*

1 to whom information regarding the assistance
2 and benefits available to the veterans under laws
3 administered by the Secretary shall be dissemi-
4 nated using the contact information obtained
5 under paragraph (7); and

6 (B) provides such persons, within 30 days
7 after the date on which such persons are des-
8 ignated under subparagraph (A), the option to
9 elect to receive such information.

10 (2) *DURATION.*—The Secretary shall carry out
11 the pilot program during a period beginning on the
12 date of the commencement of the pilot program that
13 is not less than two years.

14 (3) *DISSEMINATION.*—The Secretary shall dis-
15 seminate information described in paragraph (1)(A)
16 under the pilot program no less frequently than quar-
17 terly.

18 (4) *TYPES OF INFORMATION.*—The types of infor-
19 mation to be disseminated under the pilot program to
20 persons who elect to receive such information shall in-
21 clude information regarding the following:

22 (A) Services and benefits offered to veterans
23 and their family members by the Department of
24 Veterans Affairs.

1 (B) Challenges and stresses that might ac-
2 company transitioning from service in the
3 Armed Forces to civilian life.

4 (C) Services available to veterans and their
5 family members to cope with the experiences and
6 challenges of service in the Armed Forces and
7 transition from such service to civilian life.

8 (D) Services available through community
9 partner organizations to support veterans and
10 their family members.

11 (E) Services available through Federal,
12 State, and local government agencies to support
13 veterans and their family members.

14 (F) The environmental health registry pro-
15 gram, health and wellness programs, and re-
16 sources for preventing and managing diseases
17 and illnesses.

18 (G) A toll-free telephone number through
19 which such persons who elect to receive informa-
20 tion under the pilot program may request infor-
21 mation regarding the program.

22 (H) Such other matters as the Secretary, in
23 consultation with members of the Armed Forces
24 and such persons who elect to receive informa-

1 tion under the pilot program, determines to be
2 appropriate.

3 (5) *PRIVACY OF INFORMATION.*—*In carrying out*
4 *the pilot program, the Secretary may not disseminate*
5 *information under paragraph (4) in violation of laws*
6 *and regulations pertaining to the privacy of members*
7 *of the Armed Forces, including requirements pursuant*
8 *to—*

9 (A) *section 552a of title 5, United States*
10 *Code; and*

11 (B) *the Health Insurance Portability and*
12 *Accountability Act of 1996 (Public Law 104–*
13 *191).*

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

17 (A) *ensure that such veteran is notified of*
18 *the ability to modify designations made by such*
19 *veteran under paragraph (1)(A); and*

20 (B) *upon the request of a veteran, authorize*
21 *such veteran to modify such designations at any*
22 *time.*

23 (7) *CONTACT INFORMATION.*—*In making a des-*
24 *ignation under the pilot program, a veteran shall*
25 *provide necessary contact information, specifically in-*

cluding an email address, to facilitate the dissemination of information regarding the assistance and benefits available to the veteran under laws administered by the Secretary.

(8) *OPT-IN AND OPT-OUT OF PILOT PROGRAM.*—

(A) *OPT-IN BY MEMBERS.*—A veteran may participate in the pilot program only if the veteran voluntarily elects to participate in the program. A veteran seeking to make such an election 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.*—

1 (A) *IN GENERAL.*—Not later than one year
 2 after the date of the commencement of the pilot
 3 program and not less frequently than once each
 4 year thereafter for the duration of the pilot pro-
 5 gram, the Secretary shall administer a survey to
 6 persons who elected to receive information under
 7 the pilot program for the purpose of receiving
 8 feedback regarding the quality of information
 9 disseminated under this section.

10 (B) *ELEMENTS.*—Each survey conducted
 11 under subparagraph (A) shall include sollicita-
 12 tion of the following:

13 (i) *Feedback on the following:*

14 (I) *The nature of information dis-*
 15 *seminated under the pilot program.*

16 (II) *Satisfaction with the pilot*
 17 *program.*

18 (III) *The utility of the pilot pro-*
 19 *gram.*

20 (IV) *Overall pilot program suc-*
 21 *cesses and challenges.*

22 (ii) *Recommendations for improving*
 23 *the pilot program.*

24 (iii) *Reasons for opting in or out of the*
 25 *pilot program.*

1 (iv) *Such other feedback or matters as*
2 *the Secretary considers appropriate.*

3 (2) *REPORT.—*

4 (A) *IN GENERAL.—Not later than three*
5 *years after the date on which the pilot program*
6 *commences, the Secretary shall submit to the*
7 *Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate*
8 *and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the*
9 *House of Representatives a final report on the*
10 *pilot program.*

11 (B) *CONTENTS.—The report submitted*
12 *under subparagraph (A) shall include the fol-*
13 *lowing:*

14 (i) *The results of the survey adminis-*
15 *tered under paragraph (1).*

16 (ii) *The number of participants en-*
17 *rolled in the pilot program who are vet-*
18 *erans.*

19 (iii) *The number of persons designated*
20 *under subsection (a)(1)(A).*

21 (iv) *The number of such persons who*
22 *opted in or out of the pilot program under*
23 *subsection (a)(8).*

24 (v) *The average period such persons re-*
25 *mained in the pilot program.*

1 (vi) *An assessment of the feasibility*
2 *and advisability of making the pilot pro-*
3 *gram permanent.*

4 (vii) *Identification of legislative or ad-*
5 *ministrative action that may be necessary if*
6 *the pilot program is made permanent.*

7 (viii) *A plan to expand the pilot pro-*
8 *gram if the pilot program is made perma-*
9 *nent.*

10 (ix) *If the Secretary finds under clause*
11 *(vi) that making the pilot program perma-*
12 *nent is not feasible or advisable, a justifica-*
13 *tion for such finding.*

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