

Calendar No. _____

119TH CONGRESS
2^D SESSION**S. 3033****[Report No. 119-_____]**

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish partnerships between medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs and medical facilities in rural areas, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 22 (legislative day, OCTOBER 21), 2025

Ms. DUCKWORTH (for herself and Mrs. BLACKBURN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

_____ (legislative day, _____), _____

Reported by _____, with an amendment and an amendment to the title

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

A BILL

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish partnerships between medical facilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs and medical facilities in rural areas, 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 “Improving Access to
3 Care for Rural Veterans Act”.

4 **SEC. 2. PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN MEDICAL FACILITIES OF**
5 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND**
6 **RURAL MEDICAL FACILITIES.**

7 (a) PARTNERSHIPS.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans
9 Affairs shall require that each medical facility of the
10 Department of Veterans Affairs enter into a part-
11 nership with a medical facility in a rural area.

12 (2) AGREEMENTS.—Each partnership entered
13 into under paragraph (1) may include an agreement
14 for provision of telehealth, co-location or leasing of
15 space or equipment, training, care coordination,
16 emergency services (including transportation), or
17 other services as determined appropriate.

18 (3) PURPOSE OF PARTNERSHIP.—The purpose
19 of any partnership entered into under paragraph (1)
20 shall be to provide greater access to care for vet-
21 erans in rural areas and to reduce costs to all enti-
22 ties within the partnership.

23 (b) WAIVER.—

24 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may waive
25 the requirement under subsection (a)(1) with respect
26 to a medical facility for a period not to exceed five

1 years, subject to such requirements as the Secretary
2 may establish, if the Secretary notifies Congress of
3 the waiver not later than 48 hours before the waiver
4 takes effect.

5 (2) RENEWAL.—The Secretary may renew a
6 waiver under paragraph (1) with respect to a med-
7 ical facility only if the Secretary, in consultation
8 with the head of the medical facility, evaluates the
9 need for the waiver and determines that the waiver
10 is necessary.

11 (c) BRIEFING.—Not later than 180 days after the
12 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall pro-
13 vide to the appropriate committees of Congress a briefing
14 on the plans of the Secretary for the implementation of
15 the requirement under subsection (a)(1), including—

16 (1) a timeline for implementation of such re-
17 quirement;

18 (2) an identification of an official of the De-
19 partment responsible for oversight and implementa-
20 tion of such requirement;

21 (3) an update on the establishment of any of-
22 fice, task force, or personnel assignments to support
23 the implementation of such requirement;

24 (4) a description of the plan of the Department
25 for oversight of such requirement;

1 (5) a standardized form or forms to be used for
2 waivers under subsection (b) and an explanation of
3 the criteria for eligibility for such a waiver; and

4 (6) such other information as the Secretary
5 considers to be of interest to the appropriate com-
6 mittees of Congress.

7 (d) REPORT.—Not later than two years after the date
8 of the enactment of this Act, and biennially thereafter, the
9 Secretary shall submit to the appropriate committees of
10 Congress a report on the operation and performance of
11 partnerships entered into under subsection (a), includ-
12 ing—

13 (1) new partnerships created, in the case of the
14 initial report, since the date of the enactment of this
15 Act, and, in the case of any subsequent report, dur-
16 ing the period following the previous report;

17 (2) existing partnerships between medical facili-
18 ties of the Department and medical facilities in rural
19 areas; and

20 (3) as assessment of the success of all partner-
21 ships described in paragraphs (1) and (2) in deliv-
22 ering services to veterans in rural areas, including—

23 (A) the number of veterans enrolled in the
24 system of annual patient enrollment of the De-
25 partment under section 1705(a) of title 38;

1 United States Code, in the region in which the
2 partnered medical facilities are located com-
3 pared to the previous five-year period;

4 (B) an evaluation of accessibility to serv-
5 ices as compared to the services available to
6 those veterans prior to the implementation of
7 such partnerships;

8 (C) an overview of new best practices de-
9 veloped for such partnerships and the Depart-
10 ment more broadly; and

11 (D) the number of veterans receiving com-
12 pensation from the Department for a service-
13 connected disability in the region in which the
14 partnered medical facilities are located com-
15 pared to the previous five-year period.

16 (e) TIMELINE.—

17 (1) EXISTING FACILITIES.—Except as provided
18 in paragraph (2), by not later than three years after
19 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
20 shall ensure that all medical facilities of the Depart-
21 ment that are seeing patients are compliant with the
22 requirement under subsection (a)(1) or have received
23 a waiver under subsection (b).

24 (2) NEW FACILITIES.—The Secretary shall en-
25 sure that any medical facility of the Department es-

1 established after the date of the enactment of this Act
2 is compliant with the requirement under subsection
3 (a)(1) or has received a waiver under subsection (b)
4 by not later than three years after the date on which
5 patients are first seen at the medical facility.

6 (f) ~~RELATIONSHIP TO EXISTING LAW.~~—The require-
7 ments and authorities under this section are in addition
8 to, and separate from, the authority under section 8153
9 of title 38, United States Code.

10 (g) ~~DEFINITIONS.~~—In this section:

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

14 (A) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs
15 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
16 Senate; and

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

20 (2) ~~PARTNERSHIP.~~—The term “partnership”
21 includes a leasing or co-location agreement, a memo-
22 randum of understanding, a partnership agreement,
23 an employment contract, an independent contractor
24 agreement, a service agreement, or any other similar
25 agreement.

1 “(B) each medical facility of the Depart-
2 ment not described in subparagraph (A) benefits
3 from or provides support to at least one such
4 agreement.

5 “(2) *PURPOSES OF AGREEMENT.*—*The purposes*
6 *of an agreement entered into under paragraph (1)*
7 *shall be—*

8 “(A) *to provide greater access to care for el-*
9 *igible veterans; and*

10 “(B) *to reduce the initial or long-term costs*
11 *to the Department or the eligible entity of pro-*
12 *viding such care for eligible veterans.*

13 “(3) *TERMS.*—*Each agreement entered into*
14 *under paragraph (1) with an eligible entity may in-*
15 *clude terms related to one or more of the following:*

16 “(A) *Co-location of Department and non-*
17 *Department health care resources.*

18 “(B) *The provision of telehealth to eligible*
19 *veterans by health care providers of the Depart-*
20 *ment.*

21 “(C) *Leasing of space or equipment by or*
22 *from the Department.*

23 “(D) *Training by health care providers of*
24 *the Department of non-Department health care*
25 *providers, subject to paragraph (4).*

1 “(E) Care coordination for authorized care
2 furnished by the eligible entity for eligible vet-
3 erans.

4 “(F) Care coordination, including transpor-
5 tation coordination, for emergency treatment (as
6 defined in section 1725(h) of this title).

7 “(G) The provision by the eligible entity of
8 hospital care, medical services, or extended care
9 services under section 1703 of this title.

10 “(H) Such other conditions or services as
11 the Secretary determines appropriate.

12 “(4) *THIRD-PARTY AGREEMENT.*—With the con-
13 sent of the other party to an agreement under para-
14 graph (1), the Secretary or an eligible entity may
15 enter into an agreement with a third-party to facili-
16 tate the implementation of the agreement under para-
17 graph (1).

18 “(5) *TYPES OF ARRANGEMENTS.*—An agreement
19 under paragraph (1) may include a lease or co-locat-
20 ion agreement, a memorandum of understanding, a
21 partnership agreement, a contract or agreement for
22 the mutual use or exchange of use of health-care re-
23 sources, or any other similar agreement or arrange-
24 ment.

25 “(b) *WAIVER.*—

1 “(1) *IN GENERAL.*—*The Secretary may waive*
2 *the requirement under subsection (a)(1)(A) with re-*
3 *spect to a medical center of the Department for a pe-*
4 *riod not to exceed five years, subject to such require-*
5 *ments as the Secretary may establish, if the Secretary*
6 *notifies Congress of the waiver not later than 48*
7 *hours before the waiver takes effect.*

8 “(2) *RENEWAL.*—*The Secretary may renew a*
9 *waiver under paragraph (1) with respect to a medical*
10 *center of the Department for subsequent periods not to*
11 *exceed five years only if the Secretary, in consultation*
12 *with the head of such medical center, evaluates the*
13 *need for the waiver and determines that the waiver is*
14 *necessary.*

15 “(3) *AUTHORITY TO NULLIFY WAIVER.*—*The Sec-*
16 *retary may nullify a waiver issued to a medical cen-*
17 *ter of the Department under paragraph (1), or a re-*
18 *newal under paragraph (2), if the Secretary deter-*
19 *mines the medical center no longer requires such*
20 *waiver.*

21 “(c) *REPORT.*—*Not later than four years after the date*
22 *of the enactment of the Improving Access to Care for Rural*
23 *Veterans Act, and biennially thereafter, the Secretary shall*
24 *submit to the appropriate committees of Congress a report*

1 *on the operation and performance of agreements entered*
2 *into under subsection (a)(1), including—*

3 “(1) *new agreements entered into, in the case of*
4 *the initial report, since the date of the enactment of*
5 *the Improving Access to Care for Rural Veterans Act,*
6 *and, in the case of any subsequent report, during the*
7 *period following the previous report;*

8 “(2) *existing agreements between the Secretary*
9 *and eligible entities;*

10 “(3) *as assessment of the success of all agree-*
11 *ments described in paragraphs (1) and (2) in deliv-*
12 *ering services to eligible veterans, including—*

13 “(A) *the number of eligible veterans, by re-*
14 *gion, who received services under an agreement*
15 *described in subsection (a)(1) compared to the*
16 *previous five-year period;*

17 “(B) *an evaluation of accessibility to serv-*
18 *ices for eligible veterans as compared to the ac-*
19 *cessibility of services for those veterans prior to*
20 *the implementation of such agreements;*

21 “(C) *an overview of best practices, includ-*
22 *ing new best practices, developed for such agree-*
23 *ments and the Department more broadly; and*

24 “(D) *the number of veterans receiving com-*
25 *ensation from the Department for a service-con-*

1 *nected disability, dissaggregated by region, com-*
2 *pared to the previous five-year period.*

3 “(d) *TIMELINE.*—

4 “(1) *EXISTING FACILITIES.*—*Not later than three*
5 *years after the date of the enactment of the Improving*
6 *Access to Care for Rural Veterans Act, the Secretary*
7 *shall ensure that all medical centers of the Depart-*
8 *ment in operation as of such date of enactment are*
9 *compliant with the requirement under subsection*
10 *(a)(1) or have received a waiver under subsection (b).*

11 “(2) *NEW FACILITIES.*—*The Secretary shall en-*
12 *sure that any medical center of the Department estab-*
13 *lished after the date of the enactment of the Improv-*
14 *ing Access to Care for Rural Veterans Act is compli-*
15 *ant with the requirement under subsection (a)(1), or*
16 *has received a waiver under subsection (b), by not*
17 *later than three years after the date on which such*
18 *medical center begins operations.*

19 “(e) *DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY.*—*The delegation of*
20 *authority to the Secretary under this section is an express*
21 *delegation of authority by Congress and shall be interpreted*
22 *as such by any reviewing court or body.*

23 “(f) *DEFINITIONS.*—*In this section:*

1 “(1) *APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CON-*
2 *GRESS.—The term ‘appropriate committees of Con-*
3 *gress’ means—*

4 “(A) *the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs*
5 *and the Committee on Appropriations of the*
6 *Senate; and*

7 “(B) *the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs*
8 *and the Committee on Appropriations of the*
9 *House of Representatives.*

10 “(2) *ELIGIBLE ENTITY.—The term ‘eligible enti-*
11 *ty’ means a non-Department entity or provider fur-*
12 *nishing health care or health care services in a rural*
13 *area.*

14 “(3) *ELIGIBLE VETERAN.—The term ‘eligible vet-*
15 *eran’ means a covered veteran under section 1703(b)*
16 *of this title.*

17 “(4) *MATERIAL SUPPORT.—The term ‘material*
18 *support’ means support provided by a health care*
19 *provider or other staff of the Department to further*
20 *the purpose or purposes of an agreement under sub-*
21 *section (a)(1) and may include—*

22 “(A) *the use of time or resources of health*
23 *care providers of the Department;*

24 “(B) *the obligation or receipt of funds; and*

1 (C) an update on how the Secretary intends
2 to provide guidance and oversight of the imple-
3 mentation of such requirements;

4 (D) a standardized process to be used to re-
5 view requests for waivers or renewals under sec-
6 tion 1705B(b) of title 38, United States Code, as
7 added by subsection (a), and an explanation of
8 the criteria for eligibility for such a waiver or
9 renewal; and

10 (E) such other information as the Secretary
11 considers to be of interest to the appropriate
12 committees of Congress.

13 (2) *APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS*
14 *DEFINED.*—*In this subsection, the term “appropriate*
15 *committees of Congress” means—*

16 (A) *the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and*
17 *the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate;*
18 *and*

19 (B) *the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and*
20 *the Committee on Appropriations of the House of*
21 *Representatives.*

Amend the title so as to read: “A bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish agreements between medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs and medical facilities in rural areas, and for other purposes.”.