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(Original Signature of Member)

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to award grants to States to improve outreach to veterans, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. LEVIN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to authorize the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to award grants to States to improve outreach to 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 “Commitment to Vet-
5 eran Support and Outreach Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. AUTHORITY FOR SECRETARY OF VETERANS AF-**
2 **FAIRS TO AWARD GRANTS TO STATES AND IN-**
3 **DIAN TRIBES TO IMPROVE OUTREACH TO**
4 **VETERANS.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United
6 States Code, is amended—

7 (1) by redesignating sections 6307 and 6308
8 and sections 6308 and 6309, respectively; and

9 (2) by inserting after section 6306 the following
10 new section 6307:

11 **“§ 6307. Grants to States and Indian Tribes to im-**
12 **prove outreach to veterans**

13 “(a) PURPOSE.—It is the purpose of this section to
14 provide for assistance by the Secretary to States and In-
15 dian Tribes to carry out programs that—

16 “(1) improve outreach and assistance to vet-
17 erans and the spouses, children, and parents of vet-
18 erans, to ensure that such individuals are fully in-
19 formed about any veterans and veterans-related ben-
20 efits and programs (including veterans programs of
21 a State or Indian Tribe) for which they may be eligi-
22 ble; and

23 “(2) facilitate opportunities for such individuals
24 to receive competent, qualified services in the prepa-
25 ration, presentation, and prosecution of veterans
26 benefits claims.

1 “(b) AUTHORITY.—The Secretary may award grants
2 under this section to States and Indian Tribes—

3 “(1) to carry out, coordinate, improve, or other-
4 wise enhance outreach activities;

5 “(2) to increase the number of county or Tribal
6 veterans service officers serving in the State or In-
7 dian Tribe by hiring new, additional such officers; or

8 “(3) to expand, carry out, coordinate, improve,
9 or otherwise enhance existing programs, activities,
10 and services of the existing organization of the State
11 or Indian Tribe that has been recognized by the De-
12 partment of Veterans Affairs pursuant to section
13 5902, in the preparation, presentation, and prosecu-
14 tion of claims for veterans benefits through rep-
15 resentatives who hold positions as county or Tribal
16 veterans service officers.

17 “(c) APPLICATION.—(1) To be eligible for a grant
18 under this section, a State or Indian Tribe shall submit
19 to the Secretary an application therefor at such time, in
20 such manner, and containing such information as the Sec-
21 retary may require.

22 “(2) Each application submitted under paragraph (1)
23 shall include the following:

24 “(A) A detailed plan for the use of the grant.

1 “(B) A description of the programs through
2 which the State or Indian Tribe will meet the out-
3 come measures developed by the Secretary under
4 subsection (i).

5 “(C) A description of how the State or Indian
6 Tribe will distribute grant amounts equitably among
7 counties (or Tribal lands, as the case may be) with
8 varying levels of urbanization.

9 “(D) A plan for how the grant will be used to
10 meet the unique needs of American Indian or Alaska
11 Native veterans, elderly veterans, women veterans,
12 and veterans from other underserved communities.

13 “(d) DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary shall seek to en-
14 sure that grants awarded under this section are equitably
15 distributed among States and Indian Tribes with varying
16 levels of urbanization.

17 “(e) PRIORITY.—The Secretary shall prioritize
18 awarding grants under this section that will serve the fol-
19 lowing areas:

20 “(1) Areas with a critical shortage of county or
21 Tribal veterans service officers.

22 “(2) Areas with high rates of—

23 “(A) suicide among veterans; or

24 “(B) referrals to the Veterans Crisis Line.

1 “(f) USE OF COUNTY OR TRIBAL VETERANS SERV-
2 ICE OFFICERS.—A State or Indian Tribe that receives a
3 grant under this section to carry out an activity described
4 in subsection (b)(1) may only carry out the activity
5 through—

6 “(1) a county or Tribal veterans service officer
7 of the State or Indian Tribe; or

8 “(2) if the State or Indian Tribe does not have
9 a county or Tribal veterans service officer, or if the
10 county or Tribal veterans service officers of the
11 State or Indian Tribe cover only a portion of that
12 State or Indian Tribe, an appropriate entity of a
13 State, local, or Tribal government, as determined by
14 the Secretary.

15 “(g) REQUIRED ACTIVITIES.—Any grant awarded
16 under this section shall be used—

17 “(1) to expand existing programs, activities,
18 and services;

19 “(2) to hire and maintain new, additional coun-
20 ty or Tribal veterans service officers; or

21 “(3) for travel and transportation to facilitate
22 carrying out paragraph (1) or (2).

23 “(h) OTHER PERMISSIBLE ACTIVITIES.—A grant
24 under this section may be used to provide education and
25 training, including on-the-job training, for State, county,

1 local, and Tribal government employees who provide (or
2 when trained will provide) veterans outreach services in
3 order for those employees to obtain and maintain accredi-
4 tation in accordance with procedures approved by the Sec-
5 retary.

6 “(i) **OUTCOME MEASURES.**—(1) The Secretary shall
7 develop and provide to each State or Indian Tribe that
8 receives a grant under this section written guidance on
9 the following:

10 “(A) Outcome measures.

11 “(B) Policies of the Department.

12 “(2) In developing outcome measures under para-
13 graph (1), the Secretary shall consider the following goals:

14 “(A) Increasing the use of veterans and vet-
15 erans-related benefits, particularly among vulnerable
16 populations.

17 “(B) Increasing the number of county and
18 Tribal veterans service officers recognized by the
19 Secretary for the representation of veterans under
20 chapter 59 of this title.

21 “(j) **TRACKING REQUIREMENTS.**—(1) With respect
22 to each grant awarded under this section, the Secretary
23 shall track the use of veterans benefits among the popu-
24 lation served by the grant, including the average period
25 of time between the date on which a veteran or other eligi-

1 ble claimant applies for such a benefit and the date on
2 which the veteran or other eligible claimant receives the
3 benefit, disaggregated by type of benefit.

4 “(2) Not less frequently than annually during the life
5 of the grant program established under this section, the
6 Secretary shall submit to Congress a report on—

7 “(A) the information tracked under paragraph
8 (1);

9 “(B) how the grants awarded under this section
10 serve the unique needs of American Indian or Alaska
11 Native veterans, elderly veterans, women veterans,
12 and veterans from other underserved communities;
13 and

14 “(C) other information provided by States and
15 Indian Tribes pursuant to the grant reporting re-
16 quirements.

17 “(k) PERFORMANCE REVIEW.—(1) The Secretary
18 shall—

19 “(A) review the performance of each State or
20 Indian Tribe that receives a grant under this sec-
21 tion; and

22 “(B) make information regarding such perform-
23 ance publicly available.

24 “(l) REMEDIATION PLAN.—(1) In the case of a State
25 or Indian Tribe that receives a grant under this section

1 and does not meet the outcome measures developed by the
2 Secretary under subsection (i), the Secretary shall require
3 the State or Indian Tribe to submit a remediation plan
4 under which the State or Indian Tribe shall describe how
5 and when it plans to meet such outcome measures.

6 “(2) The Secretary may not award a subsequent
7 grant under this section to a State or Indian Tribe de-
8 scribed in paragraph (1) unless the Secretary approves the
9 remediation plan submitted by the State of Indian Tribe.

10 “(m) MAXIMUM AMOUNT.—The amount of a grant
11 awarded under this section may not exceed 10 percent of
12 amounts made available for grants under this section for
13 the fiscal year in which the grant is awarded.

14 “(n) SUPPLEMENT, NOT SUPPLANT.—Any grant
15 awarded under this section shall be used to supplement
16 and not supplant State and local funding that is otherwise
17 available.

18 “(o) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

19 “(1) The term ‘county or Tribal veterans serv-
20 ice officer’ includes a local equivalent veterans serv-
21 ice officer.

22 “(2) The term ‘Indian Tribe’ has the meaning
23 given such term in section 4 of the Indian Self-De-
24 termination and Education Assistance Act (25
25 U.S.C. 5304).

1 “(3) The term ‘State’ includes the District of
2 Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the
3 Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands,
4 and any territory or possession of the United States.

5 “(4) The term ‘Veterans Crisis Line’ means the
6 toll-free hotline for veterans established under sec-
7 tion 1720F(h) of this title.”.

8 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
9 at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended
10 by striking the items relating to sections 6307 and 6308
11 and inserting the following new items:

 “6307. Grants to States and Indian Tribes to improve outreach to veterans.

 “6308. Outreach for eligible dependents.

 “6309. Biennial report to Congress.”.

12 (c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There is
13 authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans
14 Affairs for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2028,
15 \$50,000,000 to carry out section 6307 of title 38, United
16 States Code, as added by subsection (a).

17 (d) AUTHORIZATION OF ADDITIONAL FULL-TIME
18 EQUIVALENT EMPLOYEE.—During fiscal years 2024
19 through 2028, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs may hire
20 two or more additional full-time equivalent employees in
21 the Office of the General Counsel of the Department of
22 Veterans Affairs, as compared to the number of full-time
23 equivalent employees that would otherwise be authorized

- 1 for such office, to carry out duties under the accreditation,
- 2 discipline, and fees program.