

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2915

To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to improve the provision of services and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans who experience domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or sexual assault, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

NOVEMBER 20, 2019

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Ms. MCSALLY) 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 improve the provision of services and benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans who experience domestic violence, intimate partner violence, or sexual assault, 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 “Supporting Veteran
5 Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence Act of 2019”.

1 **SEC. 2. PURPOSE.**

2 The purpose of this Act is to better integrate the
3 medical, housing, mental health, and other benefits pro-
4 vided by the Department of Veterans Affairs with existing
5 community-based domestic violence, intimate partner vio-
6 lence, and sexual assault services—

7 (1) to provide a more efficient and coordinated
8 network of support for veterans experiencing domes-
9 tic violence, intimate partner violence, or sexual as-
10 sault; and

11 (2) to better understand the effect of domestic
12 violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual as-
13 sault on veterans.

14 **SEC. 3. PROGRAM TO ASSIST VETERANS WHO EXPERIENCE**
15 **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, INTIMATE PARTNER**
16 **VIOLENCE, OR SEXUAL ASSAULT.**

17 (a) PROGRAM REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Vet-
18 erans Affairs shall carry out a program to assist veterans
19 that have experienced or are experiencing domestic vio-
20 lence, intimate partner violence, or sexual assault in ac-
21 cessing benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs,
22 including coordinating access to medical treatment cen-
23 ters, housing assistance, and other benefits from the De-
24 partment.

25 (b) PARTNERSHIP.—The Secretary shall carry out
26 the program under subsection (a) in partnership with—

- 1 (1) domestic violence shelters and programs;
- 2 (2) rape crisis centers;
- 3 (3) State domestic violence and sexual assault
- 4 coalitions; and
- 5 (4) such other health care or other service pro-
- 6 viders that serve domestic violence, intimate partner
- 7 violence, or sexual assault victims as determined by
- 8 the Secretary, particularly those providing emer-
- 9 gency services or housing assistance.

10 (c) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—In carrying out the
11 program under subsection (a), the Secretary may conduct
12 the following activities:

- 13 (1) Training for community-based domestic vio-
- 14 lence, intimate partner violence, or sexual assault
- 15 service providers on—

- 16 (A) identifying veterans who have been vic-
- 17 tims of domestic violence, intimate partner vio-
- 18 lence, or sexual assault;

- 19 (B) coordinating with local service pro-
- 20 viders of the Department; and

- 21 (C) connecting veterans with appropriate
- 22 housing, mental health, medical, and other fi-
- 23 nancial assistance or benefits from the Depart-
- 24 ment.

1 (2) Assistance to service providers to ensure ac-
 2 cess of veterans to domestic violence, intimate part-
 3 ner violence, and sexual assault emergency services,
 4 particularly in underserved areas, including services
 5 for members of Indian tribes.

6 (3) Such other outreach and assistance as the
 7 Secretary determines necessary for the provision of
 8 assistance under subsection (a).

9 (d) DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, INTIMATE PARTNER VIO-
 10 LENCE, AND SEXUAL ASSAULT OUTREACH COORDINA-
 11 TORS.—

12 (1) IN GENERAL.—In order to effectively assist
 13 veterans who have experienced domestic violence, in-
 14 timate partner violence, or sexual assault, the Sec-
 15 retary may establish local coordinators to provide
 16 outreach under the program required by subsection
 17 (a).

18 (2) LOCAL COORDINATOR KNOWLEDGE.—The
 19 Secretary shall ensure that each coordinator estab-
 20 lished under paragraph (1) is knowledgeable about—

21 (A) the dynamics of domestic violence, inti-
 22 mate partner violence, and sexual assault, in-
 23 cluding safety concerns, legal protections, and
 24 the need for the provision of confidential serv-
 25 ices;

1 (B) the eligibility of veterans for services
2 and benefits from the Department that are rel-
3 evant to recovery from domestic violence, inti-
4 mate partner violence, and sexual assault, par-
5 ticularly emergency housing assistance, mental
6 health care, other health care, and disability
7 benefits; and

8 (C) local community resources addressing
9 domestic violence, intimate partner violence,
10 and sexual assault.

11 (3) LOCAL COORDINATOR ASSISTANCE.—Each
12 coordinator established under paragraph (1) shall
13 assist domestic violence shelters and rape crisis cen-
14 ters in providing services to veterans.

15 **SEC. 4. NATIONAL TASK FORCE ON VETERANS EXPERI-**
16 **ENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE OR SEXUAL AS-**
17 **SAULT.**

18 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Af-
19 fairs, in consultation with the Attorney General and the
20 Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall establish
21 a national task force (in this section referred to as the
22 “Task Force”) to develop a comprehensive national pro-
23 gram, including by integrating facilities, services, and ben-
24 efits of the Department of Veterans Affairs into existing
25 networks of community-based domestic violence and sex-

1 ual assault services, to address domestic violence and sex-
2 ual assault among veterans.

3 (b) CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS.—In car-
4 rying out this section, the Task Force shall consult with—

5 (1) representatives from not fewer than three
6 national organizations or State coalitions with dem-
7 onstrated expertise in domestic violence prevention,
8 response, or advocacy; and

9 (2) representatives from not fewer than three
10 national organizations or State coalitions, particu-
11 larly those representing underserved or ethnic mi-
12 nority communities, with demonstrated expertise in
13 sexual assault prevention, response, or advocacy.

14 (c) DUTIES.—The duties of the Task Force shall in-
15 clude the following:

16 (1) To review existing services and policies of
17 the Department and develop a comprehensive na-
18 tional program to address domestic violence and sex-
19 ual assault prevention, response, and treatment.

20 (2) To review the feasibility and advisability of
21 establishing an expedited process to secure emer-
22 gency, temporary benefits, including housing or
23 other benefits, for veterans who are experiencing do-
24 mestic violence or sexual assault.

1 (3) To review and make recommendations re-
2 garding the feasibility and advisability of estab-
3 lishing dedicated, temporary housing assistance for
4 veterans experiencing domestic violence or sexual as-
5 sault.

6 (4) To identify any requirements regarding do-
7 mestic violence assistance or sexual assault response
8 and services that are not being met by the Depart-
9 ment and make recommendations on how the De-
10 partment can meet such requirements.

11 (5) To review and make recommendations re-
12 garding the feasibility and advisability of providing
13 direct services or contracting for community-based
14 services for veterans in response to a sexual assault,
15 including through the use of sexual assault nurse ex-
16 aminers, particularly in underserved or remote
17 areas, including services for members of Indian
18 tribes.

19 (6) To review the availability of counseling serv-
20 ices provided by the Department and through peer
21 network support, and to provide recommendations
22 for the enhancement of such services, to address—

23 (A) the perpetration of domestic violence
24 and sexual assault; and

1 (B) the recovery of veterans from domestic
2 violence and sexual assault.

3 (7) To review and make recommendations to
4 expand services available for veterans at risk of per-
5 petrating domestic violence, intimate partner vio-
6 lence, or sexual assault.

7 (d) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than one year after
8 the date of the enactment of this Act, and not less fre-
9 quently than once each year thereafter, the Task Force
10 shall submit to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Con-
11 gress a report on the activities of the Task Force, includ-
12 ing such recommendations for legislative or administrative
13 action as the Task Force may have.

14 **SEC. 5. NATIONAL BASELINE STUDY ON PROBLEM OF DO-**
15 **MESTIC VIOLENCE, INTIMATE PARTNER VIO-**
16 **LENCE, AND SEXUAL ASSAULT AMONG VET-**
17 **ERANS AND SPOUSES OF VETERANS.**

18 The Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in consultation
19 with the Attorney General, shall conduct a national base-
20 line study to examine the scope of the problem of domestic
21 violence, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault
22 among veterans and spouses of veterans.

1 **SEC. 6. ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS OF INTIMATE PARTNER**
2 **VIOLENCE ON WOMEN VETERANS BY ADVI-**
3 **SORY COMMITTEE ON WOMEN VETERANS.**

4 Section 542(c)(1) of title 38, United States Code, is
5 amended—

6 (1) in subparagraph (B), by striking “and” at
7 the end;

8 (2) by redesignating subparagraph (C) as sub-
9 paragraph (D); and

10 (3) by inserting after subparagraph (B) the fol-
11 lowing new subparagraph (C):

12 “(C) an assessment of the effects of intimate
13 partner violence on women veterans; and”.

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