

118TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. _____

To improve services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veteran families, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

Mrs. MURRAY (for herself, Mr. BOOZMAN, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. REED, Mrs. SHAHEEN, Mr. SANDERS, Mr. WYDEN, Mr. KAINE, and Ms. MURKOWSKI) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To improve services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for veteran families, 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 “Helping Heroes Act
5 of 2023”.

6 **SEC. 2. DEFINITIONS.**

7 In this Act:

8 (1) DEPARTMENT.—The term “Department”
9 means the Department of Veterans Affairs.

1 (2) **DISABLED VETERAN.**—The term “disabled
2 veteran” has the meaning given that term in section
3 4211 of title 38, United States Code.

4 (3) **ELIGIBLE CHILD.**—The term “eligible
5 child”, with respect to an eligible veteran, means an
6 individual who—

7 (A) is a ward, child (including stepchild),
8 grandchild, or sibling (including stepsibling or
9 halfsibling) of the eligible veteran; and

10 (B) is less than 18 years of age.

11 (4) **ELIGIBLE VETERAN.**—The term “eligible
12 veteran” means a disabled veteran who has a serv-
13 ice-connected disability rated at 70 percent or more.

14 (5) **FAMILY COORDINATOR.**—The term “Family
15 Coordinator” means an individual placed at a med-
16 ical center of the Department pursuant to section 3.

17 (6) **FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM.**—The term
18 “Family Support Program” means the program es-
19 tablished under section 4.

20 (7) **NON-DEPARTMENT PROVIDER.**—The term
21 “non-Department provider” means a public or non-
22 profit entity that is not an entity of the Department.

23 (8) **SECRETARY.**—The term “Secretary” means
24 the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

1 (9) SUPPORTIVE SERVICES.—The term “sup-
2 portive services” means services that address the so-
3 cial, emotional, and mental health, career-readiness,
4 and other needs of eligible children, including—

5 (A) wellness services, including mental,
6 emotional, behavioral, and physical health and
7 nutritional counseling and assistance;

8 (B) peer-support programs for children;

9 (C) assistance completing college admission
10 and financial aid applications, including the
11 Free Application for Federal Student Aid de-
12 scribed in section 483(a) of the Higher Edu-
13 cation Act (20 U.S.C. 1090), and accessing vet-
14 erans’ education benefits as defined under sec-
15 tion 480(c)(2) of such Act (20 U.S.C. 1087vv)
16 that eligible children may be eligible to receive;

17 (D) assistance with accessing workforce
18 development programs, including programs pro-
19 viding the activities authorized under section
20 129 of the Workforce Innovation and Oppor-
21 tunity Act (29 U.S.C. 3164), and programs of
22 vocational rehabilitation services, including pro-
23 grams authorized under title I of the Rehabili-
24 tation Act of 1973 (29 U.S.C. 720 et seq.);

25 (E) sports and recreation;

1 (F) after-school care and summer learning
2 opportunities;

3 (G) dependent care, including home and
4 community-based services;

5 (H) other resources for low-income fami-
6 lies;

7 (I) assistance transitioning from active
8 duty in the Armed Forces to veteran status;
9 and

10 (J) any other services or activities the Sec-
11 retary considers appropriate to support the
12 needs of eligible children.

13 **SEC. 3. REQUIREMENTS FOR FAMILY COORDINATORS.**

14 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than three years after
15 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
16 shall—

17 (1) place at each medical center of the Depart-
18 ment not fewer than one Family Coordinator; and

19 (2) ensure adequate staffing and resources at
20 each such medical center to ensure Family Coordina-
21 tors are able to carry out their duties.

22 (b) FAMILY COORDINATORS.—

23 (1) EMPLOYMENT.—Each Family Coordinator
24 placed at a medical center of the Department under
25 subsection (a) shall be employed full-time by the De-

1 partment as a Family Coordinator and shall have no
2 other duties in addition to the duties of a Family
3 Coordinator.

4 (2) QUALIFICATIONS.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—To qualify to be a
6 Family Coordinator under subsection (a), an in-
7 dividual shall—

8 (i) be a social worker licensed, reg-
9 istered, or certified in accordance with the
10 requirements of any State; and

11 (ii) have a graduate degree in social
12 work or a related field.

13 (B) WAIVER.—The Secretary may waive
14 the qualifications required by subparagraph (A)
15 to permit individuals in other professions to
16 serve as Family Coordinators.

17 (3) DUTIES.—Each Family Coordinator shall—

18 (A) assess the needs of the families of vet-
19 erans using evidence-based strategies;

20 (B) build positive relationships with such
21 families;

22 (C) refer veterans to local, State, and Fed-
23 eral resources that support veterans and their
24 families;

25 (D) develop and maintain a list of—

1 (i) supportive services offered by the
2 medical center at which the Family Coordi-
3 nator is placed; and

4 (ii) supportive services offered at re-
5 duced or no cost by non-Department pro-
6 viders located in the catchment area of
7 such medical center; and

8 (E) develop and maintain on an internet
9 website a list of family resources that shall be
10 made available for all veterans in the catchment
11 area of such medical center who are enrolled in
12 the patient enrollment system of the Depart-
13 ment established and operated under section
14 1705(a) of title 38, United States Code.

15 **SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
17 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall es-
18 tablish a program to be known as the Family Support Pro-
19 gram to provide and coordinate the provision of supportive
20 services to eligible veterans and eligible children.

21 (b) IMPLEMENTATION OF FAMILY SUPPORT PRO-
22 GRAM.—To carry out the Family Support Program, the
23 Secretary shall—

24 (1) provide supportive services through medical
25 centers of the Department;

1 (2) collaborate with relevant Federal agencies
2 to provide supportive services;

3 (3) provide funding to non-Department pro-
4 viders pursuant to subsection (c); and

5 (4) engage in any other activities the Secretary
6 considers appropriate.

7 (c) FUNDING TO NON-DEPARTMENT PROVIDERS.—

8 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may enter
9 into contracts and award grants to provide funding
10 to eligible non-Department providers to participate
11 in the Family Support Program.

12 (2) ELIGIBILITY.—

13 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall es-
14 tablish and make publicly available the criteria
15 for a non-Department provider to be eligible to
16 participate in the Family Support Program.

17 (B) CRITERIA.—The criteria required by
18 subparagraph (A) shall include requirements for
19 a non-Department provider—

20 (i) to provide a description of—

21 (I) each supportive service pro-
22 posed to be provided to eligible chil-
23 dren; and

1 (II) the demonstrated record of
2 the non-Department provider in pro-
3 viding such supportive service;

4 (ii) to demonstrate the ability to serve
5 families of veterans in a manner that is
6 trauma-informed and culturally and lin-
7 guistically appropriate; and

8 (iii) to agree to oversight by the Sec-
9 retary regarding—

10 (I) the use of funds provided by
11 the Department under this subsection;
12 and

13 (II) the quality of supportive
14 services provided.

15 (3) NOTICE.—The Secretary shall promptly
16 provide to eligible non-Department providers selected
17 by the Secretary to participate in the Family Sup-
18 port Program notice of the award of funds under
19 this subsection to ensure such providers have suffi-
20 cient time to prepare to provide supportive services
21 under the Family Support Program.

22 (4) AUTHORIZED ACTIVITIES.—Funds provided
23 under this subsection shall be used to provide sup-
24 portive services.

1 (5) TRAINING.—For each non-Department pro-
2 vider selected by the Secretary to participant in the
3 Family Support Program, the Secretary shall offer
4 training and technical assistance regarding the plan-
5 ning, development, and provision of supportive serv-
6 ices under the Family Support Program.

7 (d) COORDINATION WITH OTHER DEPARTMENT OF
8 VETERANS AFFAIRS PROGRAMS.—The Secretary shall
9 share best practices with and facilitate referrals of eligible
10 veterans and their families, as appropriate, from the Fam-
11 ily Support Program to other programs of the Depart-
12 ment, such as the program of support services for care-
13 givers of veterans under section 1720G(b) of title 38,
14 United States Code.

15 (e) REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.—

16 (1) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not later than one year
17 after the date of the commencement of the Family
18 Support Program, and annually thereafter, each
19 non-Department provider in receipt of funds under
20 the Family Support Program shall submit to the
21 Secretary a report describing the supportive services
22 carried out with such funds during the year covered
23 by such report.

24 (2) REPORTS TO CONGRESS.—

1 (A) REPORT ON ADDITIONAL RE-
2 SOURCES.—Not later than 90 days after the
3 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
4 shall submit to Congress a report on the poten-
5 tial need for additional resources for family
6 members of eligible veterans other than eligible
7 children.

8 (B) REPORT ON PROGRESS.—

9 (i) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one
10 year after the commencement of the Fam-
11 ily Support Program, the Secretary shall
12 submit to the Committee on Veterans' Af-
13 fairs of the Senate and the Committee on
14 Veterans' Affairs of the House of Rep-
15 resentatives a report on the progress of the
16 Family Support Program.

17 (ii) CONTENTS.—The report required
18 by clause (i) shall include—

19 (I) the number of eligible vet-
20 erans and eligible children who re-
21 ceived supportive services under the
22 Family Support Program;

23 (II) the demographic data of eli-
24 gible veterans and family members,
25 including—

- 1 (aa) the relationship to the
- 2 eligible veteran;
- 3 (bb) age;
- 4 (cc) race;
- 5 (dd) ethnicity;
- 6 (ee) gender identity;
- 7 (ff) sexual orientation;
- 8 (gg) disability; and
- 9 (hh) English proficiency and
- 10 whether a language other than
- 11 English is spoken at home;
- 12 (III) a summary of the sup-
- 13 portive services carried out under the
- 14 Family Support Program and the
- 15 costs to the Department of such sup-
- 16 portive services; and
- 17 (IV) an assessment, measured by
- 18 a survey of participants, of whether
- 19 participation in the Family Support
- 20 Program resulted in positive outcomes
- 21 for eligible veterans and eligible chil-
- 22 dren.

23 **SEC. 5. OUTREACH ON AVAILABILITY OF SERVICES.**

24 The Secretary shall conduct an outreach program to
25 ensure eligible veterans who are enrolled in the patient en-

1 rollment system of the Department established and oper-
2 ated under section 1705(a) of title 38, United States
3 Code, employees of the Department, and potential State,
4 local, and Federal entities are informed of the Family
5 Support Program and the availability of Family Coordina-
6 tors.

7 **SEC. 6. TRANSITION ASSISTANCE.**

8 Not later than one year after the date of the enact-
9 ment of this Act, the Secretary shall include information
10 regarding supportive services available for members of the
11 Armed Forces who are being separated from active duty
12 and their families, including mental health and other serv-
13 ices for children, in the transition assistance curriculum
14 offered by the Department.

15 **SEC. 7. SURVEY.**

16 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
17 date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter
18 for five years, the Secretary shall conduct a survey of dis-
19 abled veterans and their families to identify and better un-
20 derstand the needs of such disabled veterans and their
21 families.

22 (b) CONTENT.—The survey required under sub-
23 section (a) shall include questions with respect to—

1 (1) the types and quality of support disabled
2 veterans receive from the children of such disabled
3 veterans; and

4 (2) the unmet needs of such children.

5 **SEC. 8. NONDISCRIMINATION.**

6 Programs or activities receiving funds under this Act
7 may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national
8 origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity,
9 disability status, or age.

10 **SEC. 9. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

11 There are authorized to be appropriated to the Sec-
12 retary such funds as may be necessary to carry out this
13 Act.