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To enhance military recruitment by improving access to student directory information, enabling the military to inform prospective applicants about service options and the benefits of military service, such as competitive pay, education, and valuable experience, which is crucial for meeting National Security Strategy requirements and supporting combatant commander demand.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

APRIL 30, 2025

Ms. ERNST introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Armed Services

A BILL

To enhance military recruitment by improving access to student directory information, enabling the military to inform prospective applicants about service options and the benefits of military service, such as competitive pay, education, and valuable experience, which is crucial for meeting National Security Strategy requirements and supporting combatant commander demand.

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 “Service Enlistment and
3 Recruitment of Valuable Engagement Act” or the
4 “SERVE Act”.

5 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

6 Congress makes the following findings:

7 (1) Ensuring that the United States has a suf-
8 ficient number of qualified active duty military per-
9 sonnel is a matter of national security. To maintain
10 force levels, the Department of Defense must bal-
11 ance recruiting new members with retaining trained
12 servicemembers. However, the current recruitment
13 environment is the most challenging it has been in
14 50 years. A combination of factors, including a
15 strong economy, a shrinking eligible population, and
16 declining trust in institutions among Generation Z,
17 has significantly impacted the Department’s ability
18 to recruit. As of 2022, only 12 percent of youth had
19 a parent who served in the military, down from 40
20 percent in 1995.

21 (2) The disconnect between today’s youth and
22 the military has led to a lack of awareness regarding
23 the benefits of military service, such as competitive
24 pay, career training, and a meaningful mission. Re-
25 search indicates that over half of youth have never

1 considered military service, underscoring the urgent
2 need for a renewed national call to service.

3 (3) The Junior Reserve Officers' Training
4 Corps (JROTC) program offers essential leadership
5 training and character development for high school
6 students. By establishing formalized authorization
7 for students without a JROTC unit at their school
8 to utilize JROTC units at other school within their
9 school district, we will improve access and opportuni-
10 ties for students.

11 **SEC. 3. IMPROVEMENTS ON ACCESS TO POTENTIAL APPLI-**
12 **CANTS.**

13 (a) MEANINGFUL ACCESS TO HIGH SCHOOLS.—

14 (1) RECRUITING.—Section 503(c)(1)(A) of
15 chapter 31 of title 10, United States Code, is
16 amended—

17 (A) in clause (i), by striking “the same ac-
18 cess to secondary school students as is provided
19 generally to postsecondary educational institu-
20 tions or to prospective employers of those stu-
21 dents” and inserting “meaningful access to sec-
22 ondary schools, including monthly visits or at a
23 minimum no fewer than 4 times per academic
24 year spread across the school year, in high traf-
25 fic areas during peak school hours, lunch peri-

1 ods, between classes in a manner that does not
2 interfere with class attendance, and with rea-
3 sonable notice, in auditoriums and other meet-
4 ing spaces, at athletic functions and other
5 group or social activities”; and

6 (B) in clause (iii)—

7 (i) by striking “60 days” and insert-
8 ing “the 60th day after the start of the
9 school year, and thereafter, not later than
10 30 days”; and

11 (ii) by inserting “academic grades,”
12 after “student names,”.

13 (2) ROTC ACCESS.—Section 983(b) of title 10,
14 United States Code, is amended—

15 (A) in paragraph (1), by striking “in a
16 manner that is at least equal in quality and
17 scope to the access to campuses and to students
18 that is provided to any other employer” and in-
19 serting “that, at a minimum, includes no fewer
20 than 4 times per academic year spread across
21 the school year during peak school hours, while
22 classes are in session, in high-traffic areas, and
23 with reasonable notice, in auditoriums and
24 other meeting spaces, and during athletic func-
25 tions and other group or social activities”; and

1 (B) in paragraph (2)—

2 (i) in subparagraph (A)—

3 (I) by inserting “academic
4 grades,” after “names,”; and

5 (II) by striking “60th day” and
6 inserting “60th day after the start of
7 the school year and thereafter not
8 later than 30 days”; and

9 (ii) in subparagraph (B), by striking
10 the period at the end and inserting a semi-
11 colon; and

12 (C) by adding at the end the following new
13 paragraphs:

14 “(3) access by military recruiters for purposes
15 of military recruiting, with respect to students (who
16 are 17 years of age or older) not returning to the
17 institution after having been enrolled during the pre-
18 vious semester—

19 “(A) the information required under sub-
20 paragraphs (A) and (B); and

21 “(B) the reason for failure to return, if
22 collected by the institution; and

23 “(4) access by military recruiters for purposes
24 of military recruiting to lists of students (who are 17
25 years of age or older) enrolled at that institution (or

1 any subelement of that institution) who have sub-
2 mitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid,
3 together with the listed information required under
4 subparagraphs (A) and (B), if collected by the insti-
5 tution.”.

6 (b) IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH EN-
7 HANCED PROSPECTING.—Section 15(e) of the Selective
8 Service Act (50 U.S.C. 3813(e)) is amended—

9 (1) in the subsection heading, by striking
10 “NAMES AND ADDRESSES” and inserting “SELEC-
11 TIVE SERVICE SYSTEM REGISTRATION INFORMA-
12 TION”;

13 (2) by striking “to assist the Armed Forces in
14 recruiting individuals for voluntary service in the
15 Armed Forces” and inserting “to enable opportuni-
16 ties and enhance recruitment efforts for voluntary
17 service within the Armed Forces of the United
18 States”;

19 (3) by striking “, upon the request of the Sec-
20 retary of Defense or the Secretary of Homeland Se-
21 curity,” and inserting “furnish on an annual basis
22 to the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of
23 Homeland Security”;

24 (4) by inserting “, date of birth, phone number,
25 electronic mail address,” after “names”;

1 (5) by striking “Names and addresses” and in-
2 sserting “The listed information”; and

3 (6) by striking “or Secretary of Homeland Se-
4 curity” and inserting “, the military services, or the
5 Secretary of Homeland Security”.

6 **SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF AFFILIATION TYPES FOR**
7 **JROTC.**

8 (a) **POLICY.**—The Department of Defense shall es-
9 tablish policy to create two types of affiliation within the
10 Junior Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (JROTC) pro-
11 gram, as follows:

12 (1) **HOST UNIT.**—A JROTC unit located at a
13 high school that has a Memorandum of Agreement
14 with a military department to maintain a JROTC
15 program on its campus, staffed full-time.

16 (2) **CROSS-TOWN.**—A high school that has an
17 agreement with a host JROTC unit’s institution, al-
18 lowing its students to enroll in the JROTC program
19 of the host unit and participate in activities at both
20 campuses, without dedicated staff.

21 (b) **GUIDANCE.**—The Department of Defense shall
22 issue guidance to implement these affiliation types within
23 the JROTC program, ensuring clarity on the roles, re-
24 sponsibilities, and requirements for each affiliation type.

1 **SEC. 5. ESTABLISHMENT OF PILOT PROGRAM TO RECOG-**
2 **NIZE MILITARY-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS.**

3 (a) ESTABLISHMENT OF PILOT PROGRAM.—The Sec-
4 retary of Defense shall establish a two-year pilot program
5 to recognize high schools that demonstrate military enlist-
6 ment rates above the State average. The program shall
7 aim to highlight and support schools that foster a culture
8 of service and commitment to national defense by encour-
9 aging military enlistment among their students.

10 (b) DESIGNATION OF SCHOOLS.—

11 (1) IN GENERAL.—As part of the pilot pro-
12 gram, the Secretary of Defense shall designate eligi-
13 ble high schools as “HERO schools” (Honoring Ex-
14 cellence and Recruitment Opportunities) based on
15 their military enlistment rates and demonstrated
16 support for students interested in serving in the
17 Armed Forces.

18 (2) DESIGNATION.—The designation shall be
19 made in a formal letter from the Secretary of De-
20 fense, which shall be sent to each school that meets
21 the criteria outlined in subsection (c).

22 (c) ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.—To be eligible for the
23 designation, a school must meet the following criteria:

24 (1) The school must have a military enlistment
25 rate that exceeds the State average for high schools
26 in the same grade band (9th through 12th grade).

1 United States Coast Guard Academy) for applicants who
2 are graduates of high schools with military enlistment
3 rates above the State average.

4 (b) ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR PRIORITY CONSIDER-
5 ATION.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible for priority
7 consideration, a high school must meet the following
8 criteria:

9 (A) The high school's military enlistment
10 rate exceeds the State average for high schools
11 in the same grade band (9th through 12th
12 grade).

13 (B) The high school demonstrates ongoing
14 support for military service and provide re-
15 sources for students interested in military ca-
16 reers, including access to recruiters, Junior Re-
17 serve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) pro-
18 grams, and military preparatory coursework.

19 (C) The school has a documented history
20 of encouraging students to pursue military serv-
21 ice as a viable post-graduation option.

22 (2) PRIORITY STATUS.—Applicants from eligi-
23 ble high schools shall receive priority status in the
24 admissions process for each respective military serv-
25 ice academy, including consideration for appoint-

1 ments and appointments from congressional nomina-
2 tions.

3 **SEC. 7. NATIONAL WEEK OF MILITARY RECRUITMENT.**

4 (a) DESIGNATION.—Chapter 1 of title 36, United
5 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
6 lowing new section:

7 **“§ 149. National Week of Military Recruitment**

8 “(a) DESIGNATION.—The first week of April is the
9 National Week of Military Recruitment.

10 “(b) PROCLAMATION.—The President is requested to
11 issue each year a proclamation calling on the people of
12 the United States to observe the National Week of Mili-
13 tary Recruitment with appropriate ceremonies and activi-
14 ties.”.

15 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
16 for chapter 1 of title 36, United States Code, is amended
17 by inserting after the item relating to section 148 the fol-
18 lowing new item:

“149. National Week of Military Recruitment.”.

19 **SEC. 8. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.**

20 (a) REPORT ON JROTC POLICY.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
22 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
23 retary of Defense shall submit a report to the con-
24 gressional defense committees on the status of the
25 policy established under section 4(a).

1 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required under
2 paragraph (1) shall include the following elements:

3 (A) The number and locations of cross-
4 town units established under the new policy.

5 (B) Total enrollment numbers for each
6 cross-town institution.

7 (C) Recommendations for further improve-
8 ments or changes to enhance the effectiveness
9 of the JROTC program.

10 (b) REPORT ON PILOT PROGRAM TO RECOGNIZE
11 MILITARY-FRIENDLY SCHOOLS.—The Secretary of De-
12 fense shall submit a report to Congress not later than 90
13 days after the conclusion of the two-year pilot program
14 established under section 5. The report shall include—

15 (1) a list of schools designated as HERO
16 schools;

17 (2) an analysis of the impact of the designation
18 on military enlistment rates and school culture; and

19 (3) recommendations for the expansion or con-
20 tinuation of the program beyond the pilot phase.

21 (c) REPORTS ON POLICY TO PROVIDE PRIORITY
22 CONSIDERATION FOR APPLICANTS FROM HIGH SCHOOLS
23 WITH ABOVE-AVERAGE MILITARY ENLISTMENT
24 RATES.—

1 (1) IMPLEMENTATION REPORT.—Not later than
2 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
3 the Secretary of Defense shall submit to Congress a
4 report outlining the process for identifying eligible
5 high schools under section 6, the criteria used for
6 determining military enlistment rates, and a timeline
7 for the implementation of the priority consideration
8 policy under such section.

9 (2) ANNUAL REPORT.—The Secretary of De-
10 fense shall submit to Congress an annual report on
11 the number of applicants receiving priority consider-
12 ation under section 6, the cities and States where
13 the applicants attended high school, the outcomes of
14 their applications, and any impacts on military serv-
15 ice academy enrollment patterns.

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