

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 3033

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

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,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Improving Access to
5 Care for Rural Veterans Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN MEDICAL FACILITIES OF**
2 **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS AND**
3 **RURAL MEDICAL FACILITIES.**

4 (a) PARTNERSHIPS.—

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

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

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

20 (b) WAIVER.—

21 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary may waive
22 the requirement under subsection (a)(1) with respect
23 to a medical facility for a period not to exceed five
24 years, subject to such requirements as the Secretary
25 may establish, if the Secretary notifies Congress of

1 the waiver not later than 48 hours before the waiver
2 takes effect.

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

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

14 (1) a timeline for implementation of such re-
15 quirement;

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

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

22 (4) a description of the plan of the Department
23 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 (3) RURAL.—The term “rural” has the mean-
2 ing given that term under the Rural-Urban Com-
3 muting Areas (RUCA) coding system of the Depart-
4 ment of Agriculture.

5 (4) SERVICE-CONNECTED.—The term “service-
6 connected” has the meaning given that term in sec-
7 tion 101(16) of title 38, United States Code.

○