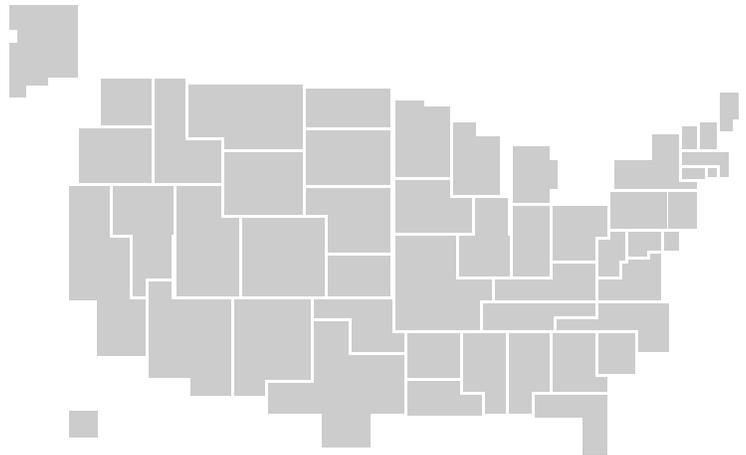


Protect and Serve: A Veterans Bill of Rights

Our nation’s veterans serve and protect us in the military -- but too often, we fail to serve and protect them when they return home: Only 30% return to civilian life with a job, nearly two million along with four million of their family members lack basic health coverage, and over 40,000 are without a home on any given night. They deserve better. And a set of simple changes and cost-effective tools will make a dramatic difference, from leveraging veterans’ unique experience and training to propel them toward jobs, to proven programs that help with re-entry to civilian life, to services that make it easier for vets to access high quality healthcare and secure housing.

THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE



IN THE NEWS



Forbes

[Giving America's Veterans The Job Opportunities They've Earned](#)

“As retired Rear Admiral Thomas C. Lynch, . . . puts it, ‘Veterans are highly motivated, hard-working, and loyal. Any workforce would be greatly strengthened by adding veterans and giving them chances to earn important responsibilities.’”



ABC News

Almost 2 Million U.S. Vets Lack Health Insurance

“Almost 2 million veterans are without health insurance, along with 3.8 million members of their households, a new study finds. . . . ‘I think that’s shocking to most people. It was certainly shocking to us.’ [said study co-author Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School.]”



CNN

Abilene, Texas, found a way to house all its homeless veterans. Other cities want to know the secret

“Aimee Hill is one homeless veteran . . . ‘It’s absolute despair. You’re in a constant state of panic inside,’ Hill said about her life before the program. ‘It’s hard to breathe because you don’t know what’s going to happen in your life.’”

Partners

- ✓ Veterans and their families
- ✓ Employers and small businesses
- ✓ Universities, colleges and vocational training schools
- ✓ Mental health providers and advocates

Opposition

- ✗ None noted

FAQ

Does this help veterans start businesses and find jobs?

Yes. Veterans are 45% more likely than non-veterans to start a business, but too often struggle to access capital. This helps veteran-owned small businesses access the capital they need by targeting small business loans directly to veterans. This also uses cutting-edge data tools to connect vets looking to be hired to job openings and in-demand fields.

Does this help veterans get job training credentials and college degrees?

Yes. This model policy makes it more likely that veterans' military experience and training -- and often demanding schedule needs -- are recognized as they transition to civilian degree and vocational credential programs. A veteran with experience as a medic would get credit for that experience when looking to qualify as an EMT or paramedic; a veteran with military training equivalent to courses needed for a college degree would get that college credit; and a veteran returning from active duty or deployed mid-semester would get needed flexibility in college course registration, credit and enrollment.

Does this help veterans get the health care they need?

Yes. Too often administrative complexity and confusing applications prevent veterans and their families from obtaining healthcare and services for which they are eligible. This helps more veterans and their families access the coverage and services they need through low-cost navigator programs, in which experienced counselors help veterans and their families identify and access critical healthcare coverage.

Does this help end veteran homelessness?

Yes. Three states and over 66 communities nationwide as diverse as Shreveport, Louisiana, Western New York and the Kansas City region, have ended veteran homelessness. Drawing on these successes, this policy sets a goal of ending veteran homelessness within three years by coordinating local, state, and federal agencies to ensure homeless veterans are identified and a system is in place to secure a home for any newly homeless veteran within 90 days.

Is this too costly to the state?

No. The small investment required for this initiative is a fraction of the benefit that veterans continue to provide in every state in the country. And this policy leverages cost-effective solutions at every step to affordably increase veterans' access to education, job training, jobs, healthcare and housing in ways that will drive economic growth, long-term cost savings and increased productivity.

SECTION 1 (TITLE):

This act shall be known as the Veterans Bill of Rights.

SECTION 2 (PURPOSE):

To help veterans access jobs, college degrees, healthcare and housing by through proven, low-cost programs and law changes.

SECTION 3 (PROVISIONS):

(1) Increase veterans' access to jobs.

(a) Target micro-loans and technical assistance to veteran-owned businesses

(i) DEPARTMENT is hereby directed to target loans from the small business revolving loan fund to small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans and service-disabled veterans as defined at 15 U.S.C. § 632(Q)(2) and (3), with a goal of 7% of annual loaned funds reaching such businesses.

(b) Apply smart labor force data to direct veterans to in-demand fields

(i) DEPARTMENT is hereby directed to produce monthly electronic reports of workforce need projections, by industry, job type, geography, and needed credential; including to compare workforce needs with existing and projected workforce and credential availability in STATE; and highlight top in-demand industries, job types, and credentials by geographic area.

(ii) DEPARTMENT shall include in this report a mapping of which in-demand job titles and credentials would leverage skills, experience and credentials possessed by veterans; and forward the underlying data report and that additional information monthly to appropriate military out-placement offices, education centers, nonprofit programs and DEPARTMENTS working to connect veterans with jobs.

(2) Increase veterans' access to college degrees, certificates, and licenses.

(a) Ensure state licensing boards recognize veterans' military training and experience

(i) The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's Military Skills Test Waiver Program has allowed all fifty state licensing agencies the authority to waive the skills test portion of the CDL application for active-duty or recently separated veterans, who possess at least two years of safe driving experience operating a military truck or bus. DEPARTMENT is hereby directed to take all necessary steps to annually increase the number of veterans taking advantage of this program, including ensuring information on the program is accessible on DEPARTMENT's homepage, coordinating with military placement and training programs, including the COOL program; and disseminating information on the program to veterans with relevant experience newly locating in STATE.

(ii) DEPARTMENT(s) licensing EMTs, paramedics, physician assistants and nurses in STATE shall immediately review all licensing practices and through regulation take all necessary and appropriate steps to increase recognition of military training and experience toward in-state licensing; DEPARTMENT shall report to the legislature within 365 days of passage of this act any additional steps that would require legislation and request that the legislature pass that legislation.

(iii) DEPARTMENT is hereby directed to review all state licenses for which military members may have relevant training or experience and, within 360 days of passage of this act, produce a report recommending steps that can be taken to increase recognition of military training and experience toward in-state licensing.

DEPARTMENT shall thereafter take as soon as practicable and no later than 365 days after issuance of the report, any steps identified in the report that can be taken

without further legislation, and shall report to the legislature annually to request it enact any necessary legislation.

(b) Award college credit for related military experiences and training.

- (i) Every veteran who enrolls as a student in good standing, at an institution within the state university system and community college system, shall upon application be granted academic credits without limitation towards his or her degree for completion of courses that were part of such veteran's military training or service if the completed courses meet the standards of the American Council on Education or its equivalent for the awarding of academic credits. No fee, tuition, or other charge shall be assessed against a veteran who qualifies for such credit pursuant to this section.
- (ii) DEPARTMENT shall adopt such procedures as are necessary to fully implement the provisions of this section.

(c) Increase flexibility in course registration to reflect returning veterans' needs.

- (i) At institutions within the state university system and community college system:
 - (1) Institutions that offer an early course registration period for any segment of the student population shall have a process in place to offer early course registration to students who are veterans or national guard members;
 - (2) A student who is called to active duty in the armed forces of the United States after having attended regularly for 13 or more weeks or having completed 85% of the term's work through acceleration shall be given full credit for each course in which he or she has a grade of C or better;
 - (3) Students called to active duty who do not meet attendance requirements sufficient to earn a grade shall be entitled to a 100% refund of tuition and fees;
 - (4) Veterans with no previous college experience shall be permitted to file applications up to the end of registration, and allowed to begin classes pending completion of their application and provision of supporting documents;
 - (5) Upon their return from active duty, veterans may register even after normal registration periods end, without late fees or other penalties.

(d) Expand proven, cost-effective training programs that leverage veterans' experiences

- (i) DEPARTMENT shall annually review apprentice, training and other vocational programs focused on providing job training and placement to returning military servicemembers and veterans. Such annual review shall evaluate the costs and results and recommend programs for expansion with state funding, including to estimate future returns to the state of improved outcomes from program expansion.
- (ii) DEPARTMENT shall provide an annual report to the legislature and Governor on January 1 of each year for five years after the passage of this act, to be used to inform annual budget decisions.

(3) Increase veterans' access to healthcare.

(a) Ensure all veterans can access the healthcare coverage and treatment they are eligible for based on their service.

- (i) DEPARTMENT is hereby directed to develop and operate veteran health navigator services to increase access to healthcare coverage and services.
 - (1) DEPARTMENT shall identify, train and deploy veteran health navigators who have direct knowledge of the veteran communities they serve.
 - (2) Veteran health navigators shall help identify all federal and other health benefits, coverage, and services available to veterans and their families.
 - (3) Veteran health navigators shall coordinate with relevant departments, health care providers, and health insurance programs to help veterans and their beneficiaries apply for coverage under such programs, including helping veterans overcome

barriers within the health care system to ensure enrollment in health plans and effective delivery and coordination of health services.

(4) Such activities should leverage existing resources and structures where veterans and their families are likely to be found.

(b) Ensure the needs of veterans and their families are incorporated in all efforts to expand access to affordable, quality healthcare

(i) Using the veteran health navigators and program described in (3)(a) above as a source of information about the unique needs, coverage and treatment gaps faced by veterans and their families, DEPARTMENT shall examine all existing programs designed to increase access to affordable quality healthcare, to evaluate whether the needs of veterans and their families are met by those programs or whether further coordination with the veteran health navigators or other steps would better meet the needs of veterans and their families;

(ii) DEPARTMENT shall execute any steps identified in (i) above and produce a report of its findings, recommendations and any additional legislative or budget action it recommends; and shall deliver that report to the Legislature and Governor in STATE and release it to the news media;

(iii) In states that have not expanded Medicaid, DEPARTMENT shall prepare a report showing the impacts that Medicaid expansion would have for the community of veterans and their families in STATE and shall deliver that report to the Legislature and Governor in STATE and release it to the news media;

(iv) In states that have expanded Medicaid, DEPARTMENT shall prepare a report showing the impacts that Medicaid expansion have had to date for the community of veterans and their families in STATE, and shall include any recommendations for better including or serving veterans and their families in that expansion; and shall deliver that report to the Legislature and Governor in STATE and release it to the news media.

(c) Ensure veterans and their families have access to adequate mental health treatment, including for post-traumatic stress disorder and depression

(i) In coordination with local, state, and federal government agencies, and in consultation with nonprofits, service providers including Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, localities, and cities that have effective prevention and treatment systems for mental health, DEPARTMENT shall develop and implement a strategy to reduce barriers to access to mental health services and treatment for veterans and their families, including by:

(1) Reducing structural and logistical barriers to accessing treatment, including long travel distances to receive care;

(2) Creating a centralized provider database, identifying by region mental health providers with expertise and ability to assist veterans and their families;

(3) Ensure access to mental health coverage, services and treatment is included as a full focus stream of the veteran health navigator program described in (3)(a) above, and that navigators help identify all federal and other mental health benefits, coverage, and services available to veterans and their families, including for post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.

(4) End veteran homelessness.

(a) Set and achieve a goal of ending veteran homelessness in three years

(i) "Ending veteran homelessness" shall be defined in accordance with the criteria most recently released by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

(ii) In coordination with local, state, and federal government agencies and nonprofits, and in consultation with states and cities that have achieved and end to veteran

homelessness in accordance with the above criteria, DEPARTMENT shall develop and implement a strategy to meet that goal within three years, including through:

- (1) Coordinated community outreach and a common assessment tool;
- (2) A community-wide comprehensive, by-name list of veterans experiencing homelessness, prioritized based on vulnerability;
- (3) Data-sharing among all relevant providers, DEPARTMENTS, and Veterans Affairs Medical Centers;
- (4) Increased coordination and streamlined processes for appropriate housing placements;
- (5) Connecting veterans experiencing homelessness to health, mental health, employment and training resources through the services described in this Act;
- (6) A commitment to Housing First principles; and
- (7) Identification of and application for funding, as needed from private, foundation, and other partners.

FUTURE NOW



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