

AMENDMENT TO
RULES COMMITTEE PRINT 117-54
OFFERED BY MR. CICILLINE OF RHODE ISLAND

Page 1236, insert after line 17 the following:

1 **SEC. 5103. IMPROVEMENT OF VET CENTERS AT DEPART-**
2 **MENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

3 (a) **PRODUCTIVITY EXPECTATIONS FOR READJUST-**
4 **MENT COUNSELORS OF VET CENTERS.—**

5 (1) **EVALUATION OF PRODUCTIVITY EXPECTA-**
6 **TIONS.—**Not later than one year after the date of
7 the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans
8 Affairs shall evaluate productivity expectations for
9 readjustment counselors of Vet Centers, including by
10 obtaining systematic feedback from counselors on
11 such expectations, including with respect to fol-
12 lowing:

13 (A) Any potential effects of productivity
14 expectations, whether positive or negative, on
15 client care and the welfare of readjustment
16 counselors.

17 (B) Distances readjustment counselors
18 may travel to appointments, especially with re-
19 spect to serving rural veterans.

1 (C) The possibility that some veterans may
2 not want to use nor benefit from telehealth or
3 group counseling.

4 (D) Availability and access of veteran pop-
5 ulations to broadband and telehealth.

6 (E) Any effect of productivity expectations
7 on readjustment counselors, including with re-
8 spect to recruitment, retention, and welfare.

9 (F) Whether productivity expectations pro-
10 vide incentives or pressure to inaccurately re-
11 port client visits.

12 (G) Whether directors and readjustment
13 counselors of Vet Centers need additional train-
14 ing or guidance on how productivity expecta-
15 tions are calculated.

16 (H) Such other criteria as the Secretary
17 considers appropriate.

18 (2) SYSTEMATIC FEEDBACK.—

19 (A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall—

20 (i) make every effort to ensure that all
21 readjustment counselors of Vet Centers are
22 given the opportunity to fully provide feed-
23 back, positive or negative, including
24 through a survey containing open- and

1 close-ended questions, on all items under
2 paragraph (1);

3 (ii) in obtaining feedback under para-
4 graph (1), ensure that the items under
5 paragraph (1) are adequately and com-
6 pletely addressed in a way that permits re-
7 sponses to be relevant to the evaluation of
8 productivity expectations;

9 (iii) collect and safely store the feed-
10 back obtained under paragraph (1)—

11 (I) in an electronic database that
12 cannot be altered by any party;

13 (II) in an anonymized manner, in
14 order to protect the privacy of each
15 respondent; and

16 (III) in a manner that allows for
17 evaluation by third parties of the feed-
18 back, such as audit of the feedback by
19 the Government Accountability Office;
20 and

21 (iv) provide the feedback obtained
22 under paragraph (1) in an anonymized
23 manner to the working group established
24 under subsection (c).

1 (B) GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OF-
2 FICE AUDIT.—Not less frequently than once
3 each year during the five-year period beginning
4 on the date of the enactment of this Act, the
5 Comptroller General of the United States shall
6 audit the feedback obtained from readjustment
7 counselors of Vet Centers under paragraph (1).

8 (3) IMPLEMENTATION OF CHANGES.—Not later
9 than 90 days after the date of the completion of the
10 evaluation required by paragraph (1), the Secretary
11 shall implement any needed changes to the produc-
12 tivity expectations described in such paragraph in
13 order to ensure—

14 (A) quality of care and access to care for
15 veterans; and

16 (B) the welfare of readjustment counselors.

17 (4) REPORT TO CONGRESS.—Not later than
18 180 days after the date of the completion of the
19 evaluation required by paragraph (1), the Secretary
20 shall submit to Congress a report on—

21 (A) the findings of the evaluation; and

22 (B) any planned or implemented changes
23 described in paragraph (3).

24 (5) PLAN FOR REASSESSMENT AND IMPLEMEN-
25 TATION.—

1 (A) PLAN.—Not later than one year after
2 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
3 retary shall develop and implement a plan for—

4 (i) reassessing productivity expecta-
5 tions for readjustment counselors of Vet
6 Centers, in consultation with such coun-
7 selors; and

8 (ii) implementing any needed changes
9 to such expectations, as the Secretary de-
10 termines appropriate.

11 (B) REASSESSMENTS.—Under the plan re-
12 quired by subparagraph (A), the Secretary shall
13 conduct a reassessment described in such para-
14 graph not less frequently than once each year.

15 (b) STAFFING MODEL FOR VET CENTERS.—

16 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
17 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
18 retary of Veterans Affairs shall develop and imple-
19 ment a staffing model for Vet Centers that incor-
20 porates key practices in the design of such staffing
21 model.

22 (2) ELEMENTS.—In developing the staffing
23 model under paragraph (1), the Secretary shall—

1 (A) involve key stakeholders, including re-
2 adjustment counselors, outreach specialists, and
3 directors of Vet Centers;

4 (B) incorporate key work activities and the
5 frequency and time required to conduct such
6 activities;

7 (C) ensure the data used in the model is
8 high quality to provide assurance that staffing
9 estimates are reliable; and

10 (D) incorporate—

11 (i) risk factors, including case com-
12 plexity;

13 (ii) geography;

14 (iii) availability, advisability, and will-
15 ingness of veterans to use telehealth or
16 group counseling; and

17 (iv) such other factors as the Sec-
18 retary considers appropriate.

19 (3) PLAN FOR ASSESSMENTS AND UPDATES.—
20 Not later than one year after the date of the enact-
21 ment of this Act, the Secretary shall develop a plan
22 for—

23 (A) assessing and updating the staffing
24 model developed and implemented under para-

1 graph (1) not less frequently than once every
2 four years; and

3 (B) implementing any needed changes to
4 such model, as the Secretary determines appro-
5 priate.

6 (c) WORKING GROUP OF READJUSTMENT COUN-
7 SELORS, OUTREACH SPECIALISTS, AND DIRECTORS OF
8 VET CENTERS.—

9 (1) IN GENERAL.—In conducting the evaluation
10 of productivity expectations under subsection (a) (1)
11 and developing the staffing model for Vet Centers
12 under subsection (b)(1), the Secretary of Veterans
13 Affairs shall establish a working group to assess—

14 (A) the efficacy, impact, and composition
15 of performance metrics for such expectations
16 with respect to—

17 (i) quality of care and access to care
18 for veterans; and

19 (ii) the welfare of readjustment coun-
20 selors and other employees of Vet Centers;
21 and

22 (B) key considerations for the development
23 of such staffing model, including with respect
24 to—

1 (i) quality of care and access to care
2 for veterans and other individuals eligible
3 for care through Vet Centers; and

4 (ii) recruitment, retention, and wel-
5 fare of employees of Vet Centers.

6 (2) MEMBERSHIP.—The working group estab-
7 lished under paragraph (1) shall be composed of re-
8 adjustment counselors, outreach specialists, and di-
9 rectors of Vet Centers.

10 (3) FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS.—The
11 working group established under paragraph (1) shall
12 provide to the Secretary—

13 (A) feedback from readjustment coun-
14 selors, outreach specialists, and directors of Vet
15 Centers; and

16 (B) recommendations on how to improve—

17 (i) quality of care and access to care
18 for veterans; and

19 (ii) the welfare of readjustment coun-
20 selors and other employees of Vet Centers.

21 (d) IMPROVEMENTS OF HIRING PRACTICES AT VET
22 CENTERS.—

23 (1) STANDARDIZATION OF POSITION DESCRIP-
24 TIONS.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
3 Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall standardize
4 descriptions of position responsibilities at Vet
5 Centers.

6 (B) REPORTING REQUIREMENT.—In each
7 of the first two annual reports submitted under
8 section 7309(e) of title 38, United States Code,
9 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
10 Secretary shall include a description of the ac-
11 tions taken by the Secretary to carry out sub-
12 paragraph (A).

13 (2) EXPANSION OF REPORTING REQUIREMENTS
14 ON READJUSTMENT COUNSELING TO INCLUDE AC-
15 TIONS TO REDUCE STAFFING VACANCIES AND TIME
16 TO HIRE.—Section 7309(e)(2) of title 38, United
17 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the
18 following new subparagraph:

19 “(D) A description of actions taken by the Sec-
20 retary to reduce—

21 “(i) vacancies in counselor positions in the
22 Readjustment Counseling Service; and

23 “(ii) the time it takes to hire such coun-
24 selors.”.

1 (e) REPORT BY GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OF-
2 FICE ON VET CENTER INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUTURE
3 INVESTMENTS.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
5 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
6 Comptroller General of the United States shall sub-
7 mit to Congress a report on physical infrastructure
8 and future investments with respect to Vet Centers.

9 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-
10 graph (1) shall include the following:

11 (A) An assessment of—

12 (i) the condition of the physical infra-
13 structure of all assets of Vet Centers,
14 whether owned or leased by the Depart-
15 ment of Veterans Affairs; and

16 (ii) the short-, medium-, and long-
17 term plans of the Department to maintain
18 and upgrade the physical infrastructure of
19 Vet Centers to address the operational
20 needs of Vet Centers as of the date of the
21 submittal of the report and future needs.

22 (B) An assessment of management and
23 strategic planning for the physical infrastruc-
24 ture of Vet Centers, including whether the De-
25 partment should buy or lease existing or addi-

1 tional locations in areas with stable or growing
2 populations of veterans.

3 (C) An assessment of whether, as of the
4 date of the submittal of the report, Vet Center
5 buildings, mobile Vet Centers, community ac-
6 cess points, and similar infrastructure are suffi-
7 cient to care for veterans or if such infrastruc-
8 ture is negatively affecting care due to limited
9 space for veterans and Vet Center personnel or
10 other factors.

11 (D) An assessment of the areas with the
12 greatest need for investments in—

13 (i) improved physical infrastructure,
14 including upgraded Vet Centers; or

15 (ii) additional physical infrastructure
16 for Vet Centers, including new Vet Centers
17 owned or leased by the Department.

18 (E) A description of the authorities and re-
19 sources that may be required for the Secretary
20 to make such investments.

21 (F) A review of all annual reports sub-
22 mitted under 7309(e) of title 38, United States
23 Code, before the date of the submittal of the re-
24 port under paragraph (1).

1 (f) PILOT PROGRAM TO COMBAT FOOD INSECURITY
2 AMONG VETERANS AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF VET-
3 ERANS.—

4 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 18 months
5 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
6 retary of Veterans Affairs shall establish a pilot pro-
7 gram to award grants to eligible entities to support
8 partnerships that address food insecurity among vet-
9 erans and family members of veterans who receive
10 services through Vet Centers or other facilities of
11 the Department as determined by the Secretary.

12 (2) DURATION OF PILOT.—The Secretary shall
13 carry out the pilot program for a three-year period
14 beginning on the date of the establishment of the
15 pilot program.

16 (3) TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.—
17 The Secretary may provide eligible entities receiving
18 grant funding under the pilot program with training
19 and technical assistance on the provision of food in-
20 security assistance services to veterans and family
21 members of veterans.

22 (4) ELIGIBLE ENTITIES.—For purposes of the
23 pilot program, an eligible entity is—

24 (A) a nonprofit organization;

1 (B) an organization recognized by the Sec-
2 retary for the representation of veterans under
3 section 5902 of title 38, United States Code;

4 (C) a public agency;

5 (D) a community-based organization; or

6 (E) an institution of higher education.

7 (5) APPLICATION.—An eligible entity seeking a
8 grant under the pilot program shall submit to the
9 Secretary an application therefor at such time, in
10 such manner, and containing such information and
11 commitments as the Secretary may require.

12 (6) SELECTION.—The Secretary shall select eli-
13 gible entities that submit applications under para-
14 graph (5) for the award of grants under the pilot
15 program using a competitive process that takes into
16 account the following:

17 (A) Capacity of the applicant entity to
18 serve veterans and family members of veterans.

19 (B) Demonstrated need of the population
20 the applicant entity would serve.

21 (C) Demonstrated need of the applicant
22 entity for assistance from the grant.

23 (D) Such other criteria as the Secretary
24 considers appropriate.

1 (7) DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary shall en-
2 sure, to the extent practicable, an equitable geo-
3 graphic distribution of grants awarded under this
4 subsection.

5 (8) MINIMUM PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS.—Any
6 grant awarded under this subsection shall be used—

7 (A) to coordinate with the Secretary with
8 respect to the provision of assistance to address
9 food insecurity among veterans and family
10 members of veterans described in paragraph
11 (1);

12 (B) to increase participation in nutrition
13 counseling programs and provide educational
14 materials and counseling to veterans and family
15 members of veterans to address food insecurity
16 and healthy diets among those individuals;

17 (C) to increase access to and enrollment in
18 Federal assistance programs, including the sup-
19 plemental nutrition assistance program under
20 the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C.
21 2011 et seq.), the special supplemental nutri-
22 tion program for women, infants, and children
23 established by section 17 of the Child Nutrition
24 Act of 1966 (42 U.S.C. 1786), the low-income
25 home energy assistance program established

1 under the Low-Income Home Energy Assist-
2 ance Act of 1981 (42 U.S.C. 8621 et seq.), and
3 any other assistance program that the Sec-
4 retary considers advisable; and

5 (D) to fulfill such other criteria as the Sec-
6 retary considers appropriate to further the pur-
7 pose of the grant and serve veterans.

8 (9) PROVISION OF INFORMATION.—Each entity
9 that receives a grant under this subsection shall pro-
10 vide to the Secretary, at least once each year during
11 the duration of the grant term, data on—

12 (A) the number of veterans and family
13 members of veterans screened for, and enrolled
14 in, programs described in subparagraphs (B)
15 and (C) of paragraph (8);

16 (B) other services provided by the entity to
17 veterans and family members of veterans using
18 funds from the grant; and

19 (C) such other data as the Secretary may
20 require.

21 (10) REPORT ON DATA COLLECTED.—For each
22 year of operation of the pilot program, the Secretary
23 shall submit to the appropriate committees of Con-
24 gress a report on the data collected under paragraph
25 (9) during such year.

1 (11) GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE
2 REPORT.—

3 (A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year
4 after the date on which the pilot program ter-
5 minates, the Comptroller General of the United
6 States shall submit to Congress a report evalu-
7 ating the effectiveness and outcomes of the ac-
8 tivities carried out under this subsection in re-
9 ducing food insecurity among veterans and fam-
10 ily members of veterans.

11 (B) ELEMENTS.—The report required by
12 subparagraph (A) shall include the following:

13 (i) A summary of the activities carried
14 out under this subsection.

15 (ii) An assessment of the effectiveness
16 and outcomes of the grants awarded under
17 this subsection, including with respect to
18 eligibility screening contacts, application
19 assistance consultations, and changes in
20 food insecurity among the population
21 served by the grant.

22 (iii) Best practices regarding the use
23 of partnerships to improve the effectiveness
24 and outcomes of public benefit programs to

1 address food insecurity among veterans
2 and family members of veterans.

3 (iv) An assessment of the feasibility
4 and advisability of making the pilot pro-
5 gram permanent and expanding to other
6 locations.

7 (12) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—

8 (A) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to
9 be appropriated to carry out the pilot program
10 established under paragraph (1) \$15,000,000
11 for each fiscal year in which the program is car-
12 ried out, beginning with the fiscal year in which
13 the program is established.

14 (B) ADMINISTRATIVE EXPENSES.—Of the
15 amounts authorized to be appropriated under
16 subparagraph (A), not more than ten percent
17 may be used for administrative expenses of the
18 Department of Veterans Affairs associated with
19 administering grants under this subsection.

20 (13) DEFINITIONS.—In this subsection:

21 (A) The term “appropriate committees of
22 Congress” means—

23 (i) the Committee on Veterans’ Af-
24 fairs, the Committee on Appropriations,

1 and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutri-
2 tion, and Forestry of the Senate; and

3 (ii) the Committee on Veterans' Af-
4 fairs, the Committee on Appropriations,
5 and the Committee on Agriculture of the
6 House of Representatives.

7 (B) The term "facilities of the Depart-
8 ment" has the meaning given that term in sec-
9 tion 1701(3) of title 38, United States Code.

10 (C) The term "institution of higher edu-
11 cation" has the meaning given that term in sec-
12 tion 101 of the Higher Education Act of 1965
13 (20 U.S.C. 1001).

14 (D) The term "public agency" means a de-
15 partment, agency, other unit, or instrumentality
16 of Federal, State, Tribal, or local government.

17 (E) The term "State" has the meaning
18 given that term in section 101(20) of title 38,
19 United States Code.

20 (F) The term "veteran" means an indi-
21 vidual who served in the Armed Forces, includ-
22 ing an individual who served in a reserve com-
23 ponent of the Armed Forces, and who was dis-
24 charged or released therefrom, regardless of the
25 conditions of such discharge or release.

1 (g) DEFINITION OF VET CENTER.—In this section,
2 the term “Vet Center” has the meaning given that term
3 in section 1712A(h) of title 38, United States Code.

