AMENDMENT TO H.R. 5620
OFFERED BY MS. KUSTER OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Page 54, after line 2, insert the following:

SEC. 11. PILOT PROGRAM TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS TO BE EMPLOYED AT THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) Pilot Program.—

(1) In General.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall carry out a pilot program to be known as the “Grow Our Own Directive” or “G.O.O.D.” pilot program (in this section referred to as the “pilot program”) to provide educational assistance to certain former members of the Armed Forces for education and training as physician assistants of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(2) Information on Pilot Program.—The Secretary shall provide information on the pilot program to eligible individuals under subsection (b), including information on application requirements and a list of entities with which the Secretary has partnered under subsection (g).
(b) ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS.—An individual is eligible to participate in the pilot program if the individual—

(1) has medical or military health experience gained while serving as a member of the Armed Forces;

(2) has received a certificate, associate degree, baccalaureate degree, master’s degree, or postbaccalaureate training in a science relating to health care;

(3) has participated in the delivery of health care services or related medical services, including participation in military training relating to the identification, evaluation, treatment, and prevention of diseases and disorders; and

(4) does not have a degree of doctor of medicine, doctor of osteopathy, or doctor of dentistry.

(c) DURATION.—The pilot program shall be carried out during the five-year period beginning on the date that is 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act.

(d) SELECTION.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall select not less than 25 eligible individuals under subsection (b) to participate in the pilot program.

(2) PRIORITY FOR SELECTION.—In selecting individuals to participate in the pilot program under
paragraph (1), the Secretary shall give priority to
the following individuals:

(A) Individuals who participated in the In-
termediate Care Technician Pilot Program of
the Department that was carried out by the
Secretary between January 2011 and February
2015.

(B) Individuals who agree to be employed
as a physician assistant for the Veterans Health
Administration at a medical facility of the De-
partment located in a community that—

(i) is designated as a medically under-
served population under section
330(b)(3)(A) of the Public Health Service
Act (42 U.S.C. 254b(b)(3)(A)); and

(ii) is in a State with a per capita
population of veterans of more than 9 per-
cent according to the National Center for
Veterans Analysis and Statistics and the
United States Census Bureau.

(e) EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—In carrying out the pilot
program, the Secretary shall provide educational as-
stance to individuals participating in the pilot pro-
gram, including through the use of scholarships, to
cover the costs to such individuals of obtaining a
master’s degree in physician assistant studies or a
similar master’s degree.

(2) USE OF EXISTING PROGRAMS.—In pro-
viding educational assistance under paragraph (1),
the Secretary shall use the Department of Veterans
Affairs Health Professionals Educational Assistance
Program under chapter 76 of title 38, United States
Code, and such other educational assistance pro-
grams of the Department as the Secretary considers
appropriate.

(3) USE OF SCHOLARSHIPS.—The Secretary
shall provide not less than 3 scholarships under the
pilot program to individuals participating in the pilot
program during each year in which the pilot pro-
gram is carried out.

(f) PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall enter
into an agreement with each individual participating
in the pilot program in which such individual agrees
to be employed as a physician assistant for the Vet-
erans Health Administration for a period of obli-
gated service specified in paragraph (2).

(2) PERIOD SPECIFIED.—With respect to each
individual participating in the pilot program, the pe-
period of obligated service specified in this paragraph for the individual is—

(A) if the individual is participating in the pilot program through a program described in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obligated service, the period specified with respect to such program; or

(B) if the individual is participating in the pilot program other than through a program described in such subsection, or if such program does not specify a period of obligated service, a period of three years or such other period as the Secretary considers appropriate for purposes of the pilot program.

(g) BREACH.—

(1) LIABILITY.—Except as provided in paragraph (2), an individual who participates in the pilot program and fails to satisfy the period of obligated service under subsection (f) shall be liable to the United States, in lieu of such obligated service, for the amount that has been paid or is payable to or on behalf of the individual under the pilot program, reduced by the proportion that the number of days served for completion of the period of obligated serv-
ice bears to the total number of days in the period of obligated service of such individual.

(2) Exception.—If an individual is participating in the pilot program through a program described in subsection (e)(2) that specifies a period of obligated service, the liability of the individual for failing to satisfy the period of obligated service under subsection (f) shall be determined as specified with respect to such program.

(h) Mentors.—The Secretary shall ensure that a physician assistant mentor or mentors are available for individuals participating in the pilot program at each facility of the Veterans Health Administration at which a participant in the pilot program is employed.

(i) Partnerships.—In carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary shall seek to partner with the following:

(1) Not less than 15 institutions of higher education that—

(A) offer a master’s degree program in physician assistant studies or a similar area of study that is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant; and

(B) agree—
(i) to guarantee seats in such master’s degree program for individuals participating in the pilot program who meet the entrance requirements for such master’s degree program; and

(ii) to provide individuals participating in the pilot program with information on admissions criteria and the admissions process.

(2) Other institutions of higher education that offer programs in physician assistant studies or other similar areas of studies that are accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant.

(3) The Transition Assistance Program of the Department of Defense.

(4) The Veterans’ Employment and Training Service of the Department of Labor.

(5) Programs carried out under chapter 41 of title 38, United States Code, for the purpose of marketing and advertising the pilot program to veterans and members of the Armed Forces who may be interested in the pilot program.

(j) ADMINISTRATION OF PILOT PROGRAM.—For purposes of carrying out the pilot program, the Secretary
shall appoint or select within the Office of Physician Assistant Services of the Veterans Health Administration the following:

(1) A Deputy Director for Education and Career Development of Physician Assistants who—

   (A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and employed by the Department as of the date of the enactment of this Act;

   (B) is responsible for—

      (i) overseeing the pilot program;

      (ii) recruiting candidates to participate in the pilot program;

      (iii) coordinating with individuals participating in the pilot program and assisting those individuals in applying and being admitted to a master’s degree program under the pilot program; and

      (iv) providing information to eligible individuals under subsection (b) with respect to the pilot program; and

   (C) may be employed in the field at a medical center of the Department.

(2) A Deputy Director of Recruitment and Retention who—
(A) is a physician assistant, a veteran, and employed by the Department as of the date of the enactment of this Act;

(B) is responsible for—

(i) identifying and coordinating the needs of the pilot program and assist the Secretary in providing mentors under subsection (h) to participants in the pilot program; and

(ii) coordinating the staff of facilities of the Veterans Health Administration with respect to identifying employment positions and mentors under subsection (h) for participants in the pilot program; and

(C) may be employed in the field at a medical center of the Department.

(3) A recruiter who—

(A) reports directly to the Deputy Director of Recruitment and Retention; and

(B) works with the Workforce Management and Consulting Office and the Healthcare Talent Management Office of the Veterans Health Administration to develop and implement national recruiting strategic plans for the
1 recruitment and retention of physician assistants within the Department.

(4) An administrative assistant, compensated at a rate not less than level GS–6 of the General Schedule, or equivalent, who assists with administrative duties relating to the pilot program in the Office of Physician Assistant Services and such other duties as determined by the Secretary to ensure that the Office runs effectively and efficiently.

(k) REPORT.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, in collaboration with the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services, shall submit to Congress a report on the pilot program.

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

(A) The extent to which the pilot program is effective in improving the ability of eligible individuals under subsection (b) to become physician assistants;

(B) An examination of whether the pilot program is achieving the goals of—
(i) enabling individuals to build on medical skills gained as members of the Armed Forces by entering into the physician assistant workforce of the Department; and

(ii) helping to meet the shortage of physician assistants employed by the Department.

(C) An identification of such modifications to the pilot program as the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Secretary of Labor, the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services consider necessary to meet the goals described in subparagraph (B).

(D) An assessment of whether the pilot program could serve as a model for other programs of the Department to assist individuals in obtaining certification and employment in other health care fields.

(I) PROHIBITION ON NEW APPROPRIATIONS.—No additional funds are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section. This section shall be carried out using amounts otherwise made available for the Department of Veterans Affairs.