

115TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 3754

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the recruitment, hiring, and retention of health professionals by the Veterans Health Administration, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 13, 2017

Mrs. HARTZLER introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

A BILL

To amend title 38, United States Code, to improve the recruitment, hiring, and retention of health professionals by the Veterans Health Administration, 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 “VHA REcruitment,
5 HIring, and REtention Act of 2017” or “VHA REHIRE
6 Act of 2017”.

1 **SEC. 2. ENHANCING THE RECRUITING, HIRING, AND RE-**
2 **TENTION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS BY**
3 **THE VHA.**

4 (a) ESTABLISHING THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS
5 AFFAIRS STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 76 of title 38,
7 United States Code, is amended by inserting after
8 subchapter VII the following new subchapter:

9 “SUBCHAPTER VIII—STUDENT LOAN
10 REPAYMENT PROGRAM

11 **“§ 7691. Establishment**

12 “As part of the Educational Assistance Program, the
13 Secretary may carry out a student loan repayment pro-
14 gram under section 5379 of title 5. The program shall be
15 known as the Department of Veterans Affairs Student
16 Loan Repayment Program (in this chapter referred to as
17 the ‘Student Loan Repayment Program’).

18 **“§ 7692. Purpose**

19 “The purpose of the Student Loan Repayment Pro-
20 gram is to assist, through the establishment of an incen-
21 tive program for certain individuals employed in the Vet-
22 erans Health Administration, in meeting the staffing
23 needs of the Veterans Health Administration for health
24 professional occupations for which recruitment or reten-
25 tion of qualified personnel is difficult.

1 **“§ 7693. Eligibility**

2 “Individuals eligible for the Student Loan Repayment
3 Program shall include any health professional hired under
4 section 7401 of this title who is in an occupation described
5 in section 7692 of this title.

6 **“§ 7694. Term of obligated service**

7 “In addition to any requirements under section
8 5379(c) of title 5, a participant in the Student Loan Re-
9 payment Program must agree, in writing and before the
10 Secretary may make any payment to or for the partici-
11 pant, to serve as a full-time employee of the Veterans
12 Health Administration for one calendar year for every
13 \$10,000 in such benefits that the employee receives, but
14 in no case for less than three calendar years.

15 **“§ 7695. Relationship to Educational Assistance Pro-**
16 **gram**

17 “Assistance under the Student Loan Repayment Pro-
18 gram may be in addition to other assistance available to
19 individuals under the Educational Assistance Program.”.

20 (2) CONFORMING AND TECHNICAL AMEND-
21 MENTS.—

22 (A) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

23 (i) Section 7601(a) of title 38, United
24 States Code, is amended—

25 (I) in paragraph (4) by striking
26 “and”;

1 (II) in paragraph (5) by striking
 2 the period and inserting “; and”; and
 3 (III) by adding at the end the
 4 following new paragraph:

5 “(6) the student loan repayment program pro-
 6 vided for in subchapter VIII of this chapter.”.

7 (ii) Section 7603(a)(1) of title 38,
 8 United States Code, is amended by strik-
 9 ing “or VI” and inserting “VI, or VIII”.

10 (iii) Section 7604 of title 38, United
 11 States Code, is amended by striking “or
 12 VI” each place it appears and inserting
 13 “VI, or VIII”.

14 (B) TABLE OF SECTIONS.—The table of
 15 sections at the beginning of chapter 76 of such
 16 title is amended by inserting after the items re-
 17 lating to subchapter VII the following:

“SUBCHAPTER VIII—STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM

“Sec.

“7691. Establishment.

“7692. Purpose.

“7693. Eligibility.

“7694. Term of obligated service.

“7695. Relationship to Educational Assistance Program.”.

18 (b) PERIODS OF OBLIGATED SERVICE FOR CERTAIN
 19 EMPLOYEES OF THE VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRA-
 20 TION.—

1 (1) EMPLOYEES OF THE VETERANS HEALTH
2 ADMINISTRATION WHO PARTICIPATE IN CERTAIN
3 EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS.—

4 (A) EMPLOYEE INCENTIVE SCHOLARSHIP
5 PROGRAM.—Section 7672(e)(1)(B) of title 38,
6 United States Code, is amended by striking
7 “for not less than 3 years” and inserting “in no
8 case for less than the longer of three calendar
9 years or one calendar year for every \$10,000 in
10 such benefits that the employee receives under
11 this subchapter”.

12 (B) EDUCATION DEBT REDUCTION PRO-
13 GRAM.—Section 7683 of title 38, United States
14 Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
15 lowing new subsections:

16 “(e) AGREEMENT.—Before the Secretary may make
17 any education debt reduction payment to or for a partici-
18 pant in the Education Debt Reduction Program, the par-
19 ticipant must agree in writing to serve as a full-time em-
20 ployee of the Veterans Health Administration for a period
21 of obligated service, but in no case for less than three cal-
22 endar years.

23 “(f) PENALTY.—A participant in the Education Debt
24 Reduction Program who does not complete a period of ob-
25 ligated service under subsection (f) shall owe the Federal

1 Government a penalty calculated using the formula in sec-
2 tion 7675(c) of this title.”.

3 (2) EMPLOYEES OF THE VETERANS HEALTH
4 ADMINISTRATION WHO RECEIVE CERTAIN BONUSES
5 OR ALLOWANCES.—Section 7410 of title 38, United
6 States Code, is amended—

7 (A) in subsection (a), by striking “The”
8 and inserting “Subject to subsection (c), the”;
9 and

10 (B) by adding at the end the following new
11 subsection:

12 “(c) PERIOD OF OBLIGATED SERVICE.—(1) Before
13 the Secretary may pay any bonus or allowance under this
14 section to an employee, the employee must agree in writing
15 to serve as a full-time employee of the Veterans Health
16 Administration for a period of obligated service deter-
17 mined under paragraph (2), but in no case for less than
18 two calendar years.

19 “(2) A period of obligated service determined under
20 this paragraph shall equal one calendar year for every 10
21 percent of the base pay of the employee (or a propor-
22 tionate ratio thereof) that the bonus or allowance equals.

23 “(3)(A) An employee who does not complete a period
24 of obligated service under this subsection shall owe the

1 Federal Government an amount determined in accordance
2 with the following formula: $A=2B(T - (S\div T))$.

3 “(B) In such formula:

4 “(i) ‘A’ is the amount the employee owes the
5 Federal Government.

6 “(ii) ‘B’ is the sum of all bonuses or allowances
7 paid to the employee under this section.

8 “(iii) ‘T’ is the number of months in the period
9 of obligated service of the employee.

10 “(iv) ‘S’ is the number of whole months of such
11 period of obligated service served by the employee.”.

12 (c) HIRING TIMELINES.—

13 (1) 75 DAYS TO HIRE.—The Secretary of Vet-
14 erans Affairs shall offer employment to a qualified
15 applicant for a vacant position in the Veterans
16 Health Administration in a health professional occu-
17 pation no later than 75 days after the last day the
18 Secretary accepts applications for such position.

19 (2) EARLY APPLICATION.—The Secretary of
20 Veterans Affairs shall accept an application for a va-
21 cant position in the Veterans Health Administration
22 in a health professional occupation from an appli-
23 cant who, at the time of application, has not yet
24 completed the education or training that qualifies an
25 individual for such position if the applicant expects

1 to complete such education or training no later than
2 75 days after the last day the Secretary accepts ap-
3 plications for such position.

4 (3) FLEXIBILITY FOR VHA FACILITY DIREC-
5 TORS.—The Secretary shall ensure that the director
6 of each facility of the Veterans Health Administra-
7 tion has the maximum discretion possible in meeting
8 staffing needs for health professional occupations in
9 each such facility for which recruitment or retention
10 of qualified personnel is difficult.

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