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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R.

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To amend chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a rural recruitment office within the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit health care professionals, and for other purposes.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. HUFFMAN introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

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# A BILL

To amend chapter 73 of title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a rural recruitment office within the Department of Veterans Affairs to recruit health care professionals, 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 “Recruiting in Under-  
5 served Rural Areas and Localities for Veterans Act” or  
6 the “RURAL Veterans Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF RURAL RE-**  
2 **CRUITMENT.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 73 of title 38, United  
4 States Code, is amended by inserting after section 7308  
5 the following new section:

6 **“§ 7308A. Office of Rural Recruitment**

7 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall estab-  
8 lish an office within the Office of the Under Secretary for  
9 Health to be known as the ‘Office of Rural Recruitment’  
10 (in this section referred to as the ‘Office’). The purpose  
11 of the Office is to improve the recruitment of health care  
12 professionals for rural and highly rural community-based  
13 outpatient clinics and medical centers of the Department  
14 of Veterans Affairs.

15 “(b) DIRECTOR.—The Under Secretary of Health  
16 shall appoint the head of the Office who shall be called  
17 the Director of the Office of Rural Recruitment (in this  
18 section referred to as the ‘Director’).

19 “(c) DUTIES.—(1) Annually, the Director, in collabo-  
20 ration with the directors of each community-based out-  
21 patient clinic and medical center of the Department of  
22 Veterans Affairs, shall, to determine the hiring needs of  
23 such clinics and centers, do the following:

24 “(A) Assess the efficacy of hiring incentives to  
25 recruit health care professionals to practice in rural  
26 and highly rural community-based outpatient clinics

1 and medical centers of the Department of Veterans  
2 Affairs.

3 “(B) Assess resources and funding necessary  
4 for rural and highly rural community-based out-  
5 patient clinics and medical centers of the Depart-  
6 ment of Veterans Affairs, which may include data  
7 from the most current determination published in  
8 the Federal Register pursuant to section 7412(a) of  
9 this title.

10 “(C) Identify hiring incentive programs offered  
11 for retaining health care professionals (including the  
12 Education Debt Reduction Program, the Employee  
13 Incentive Scholarship Program, and other programs  
14 under chapter 76 of this title) that provide scholar-  
15 ships, tuition reimbursement, and education debt re-  
16 duction for health care professionals.

17 “(D) Determine the number of health care pro-  
18 fessionals who accepted positions in rural and highly  
19 rural community-based outpatient clinics and med-  
20 ical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs  
21 during the previous fiscal year.

22 “(E) Determine the number of health care pro-  
23 fessionals that left positions described in subpara-  
24 graph (D) during the previous fiscal year.

1           “(2) The Director, in collaboration with the directors  
2 of each community-based outpatient clinic and medical  
3 center of the Department of Veterans Affairs, shall de-  
4 velop and implement a national plan using information  
5 gathered under paragraph (1) and the strategies under  
6 subsection (d) to—

7           “(A) recruit health care professionals for rural  
8 and highly rural community-based outpatient clinics  
9 and medical centers of the Department of Veterans  
10 Affairs;

11           “(B) determine which such clinics or centers  
12 are high-need;

13           “(C) develop best practices and techniques for  
14 recruiting health care professionals in rural and  
15 highly rural community-based outpatient clinics and  
16 medical centers of the Department of Veterans Af-  
17 fairs;

18           “(D) not less than twice each fiscal year, train  
19 rural recruitment employees in the best practices  
20 and techniques developed under subparagraph (C);  
21 and

22           “(E) provide recruitment resources to the Vet-  
23 erans Integrated Service Networks, rural and highly  
24 rural community-based outpatient clinics, and rural  
25 and highly rural medical centers of the Department

1 of Veterans Affairs, such as pamphlets and mar-  
2 keting material.

3 “(3) The Director shall coordinate an annual meeting  
4 for rural and highly rural community-based outpatient  
5 clinics and medical centers of the Department of Veterans  
6 Affairs to communicate rural recruitment needs among  
7 such clinics and centers.

8 “(d) VETERANS INTEGRATED SERVICE NET-  
9 WORKS.—The director of each Veterans Integrated Serv-  
10 ice Network that includes at least one rural or highly rural  
11 community-based outpatient clinic shall annually develop  
12 and maintain a strategy to recruit health care profes-  
13 sionals. Such strategy shall include the designation of at  
14 least one rural recruitment employee from the human re-  
15 sources department of such Veterans Integrated Service  
16 Network, or if no such department exists, any department  
17 within such Veterans Integrated Service Network.

18 “(e) REPORTS.—(1) The director of each rural and  
19 highly rural community-based outpatient clinic and med-  
20 ical center of the Department of Veterans Affairs shall  
21 submit to the director of the respective Veterans Inte-  
22 grated Service Network of such clinic an annual report  
23 on hiring needs with respect to recruiting health care pro-  
24 fessionals within such clinic.

1           “(2) The director of each Veterans Integrated Service  
2 Network described in subsection (d) shall submit to the  
3 Director an annual report containing—

4                   “(A) the strategy under such subsection; and

5                   “(B) a summary of hiring needs with respect to  
6 recruiting health care professionals in rural and  
7 highly rural community-based outpatient clinics.

8           “(3) The Secretary, acting through the Director,  
9 shall submit to the Committees on Veterans’ Affairs of  
10 the House of Representatives and Senate an annual report  
11 containing the information gathered pursuant to sub-  
12 section (c)(1) and the national plan under paragraph (2)  
13 of such subsection.

14           “(f) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

15                   “(1) The term ‘rural recruitment employee’  
16 means an employee of a Veterans Integrated Service  
17 Network designated under subsection (d) who is re-  
18 sponsible for recruiting health care professionals for  
19 rural and highly rural community-based outpatient  
20 clinics and medical centers of the Department of  
21 Veterans Affairs.

22                   “(2) The terms ‘rural’ and ‘highly rural’ have  
23 the meanings given such terms under the rural-  
24 urban commuting codes developed by the Secretary

1 of Agriculture and the Secretary of Health and  
2 Human Services.”.

3 (b) DESIGNATION OF RURAL RECRUITMENT EM-  
4 PLOYEE.—Not later than September 30, 2026, the direc-  
5 tor of each Veterans Integrated Service Network that has  
6 at least one rural or highly rural community-based out-  
7 patient clinic shall designate a rural recruitment employee  
8 as required by the strategy described under section  
9 7308A(d) of title 38, United States Code, as added by  
10 subsection (a).

11 (c) REPORTING TIMELINE.—The first reports under  
12 paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) of section 7308A(e) of title  
13 38, United States Code, as added by subsection (a), shall  
14 be submitted not later than 12 months, 18 months, and  
15 24 months, respectively, after the date of the enactment  
16 of this Act.

17 (d) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections  
18 at the beginning of such chapter is amended by inserting  
19 after the item relating to section 7308 the following new  
20 item:

“7308A. Office of Rural Recruitment.”.

21 **SEC. 3. STUDY ON A SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM AND ESTAB-**  
22 **LISHMENT OF A FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM FOR**  
23 **HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS.**

24 (a) STUDY ON THE FEASIBILITY OF A RURAL RE-  
25 CRUITMENT SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM.—

1           (1) FEASIBILITY STUDY.—The Director of the  
2           Office of Rural Recruitment established under sec-  
3           tion 7308A(a) of title 38, United States Code, as  
4           added by section 1(a), shall conduct a study on the  
5           feasibility of a scholarship program for health care  
6           professionals to attend the Uniformed Services Uni-  
7           versity of the Health Sciences in exchange for serv-  
8           ice as full-time employees at a rural or highly rural  
9           community-based outpatient clinic or medical center  
10          of the Department of Veterans Affairs for a period  
11          determined by the Director.

12          (2) REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION.—Not  
13          later than September 30, 2025, the Secretary, acting  
14          through the Director, shall submit to Congress a re-  
15          port—

16                 (A) on the study conducted pursuant to  
17                 paragraph (1); and

18                 (B) containing a recommendation with re-  
19                 spect to the operation of and funding for the  
20                 program described under paragraph (1).

21          (b) ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RURAL HEALTH QUAL-  
22          ITY AND ACCESS FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM.—In carrying  
23          out section 7302 of title 38, United States Code, the Sec-  
24          retary shall establish the Rural Health Quality and Access

1 Fellowship program to provide fellowships to health care  
2 professionals at the graduate or post-graduate level who—

3 (1) serve on a short-term basis as full-time em-  
4 ployees at a rural or highly rural community-based  
5 outpatient clinic or medical center of the Depart-  
6 ment of Veterans Affairs; and

7 (2) conduct research on—

8 (A) improving the quality of rural health  
9 care, including best practices for remote health  
10 care;

11 (B) access to health care in rural areas;  
12 and

13 (C) recruitment and retention of health  
14 care professionals in rural areas.

15 (c) HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL DEFINED.—In  
16 this Act, the term “health care professional” means an  
17 individual who qualifies as an appointee under section  
18 7402 of title 38, United States Code.