



H.R. 1527 – Rural Veterans Access to Care Act

FLOOR SITUATION

H.R. 1527 is being considered on the floor under suspension of the rules and will require a two-thirds majority vote for passage. This legislation was introduced by Representative Jerry Moran (R-KS) on March 14, 2007. The House Committee on Veterans' Affairs ordered the bill to be reported, as amended, by voice vote on July 16, 2008.

H.R. 1527 is expected to be considered on the floor of the House on July 29, 2008.

SUMMARY

H.R. 1527 requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to conduct a 3-year pilot project to allow highly rural veterans enrolled in VA health care to receive covered services through non-VA providers. The bill defines a highly rural veteran as one who resides 60 miles from VA primary care services, 120 miles from the nearest VA facility providing acute hospital care, or more than 240 miles from the nearest VA facility providing tertiary care (specialized consultative care).

This bill requires the Department to develop the functional capability to exchange medical information between VA and participating non-VA providers.

H.R. 1527 requires the Department to submit an annual report to Congress that includes an assessment of the program cost, volume, quality, patient satisfaction; and benefit to veterans, as well as any recommendations for continuation, extension, or for making the program permanent.

BACKGROUND

Because they often live far from VA healthcare facilities, rural veterans have experienced difficulty obtaining medical care. The VA medical system was realigned in the 1990s to concentrate specialized care facilities in urban areas. In addition, federal community health centers in rural areas often do not accept VA payments. A 2004 Veterans Affairs Department study indicated that rural veterans tend to have more serious and costly health problems than their urban counterparts.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is the medical agency of the Department of Veterans Affairs that implements the medical assistance program of the VA through the administration and operation of numerous VA outpatient clinics, hospitals, medical centers and other healthcare facilities. In 2007, there were 7.8 million veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system. The VA operates 153 medical centers across the country, and over 700 community-based outpatient clinics. The Department of Veterans Affairs employs some 263,000 personnel.

COST

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has not produced a cost estimate for H.R. 1527 as of July 28, 2008.

STAFF CONTACT

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