

115TH CONGRESS  
1ST SESSION

# S. 1723

To appropriate amounts to the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve health care furnished by the Department, and for other purposes.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

AUGUST 2, 2017

Mr. SANDERS introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs

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## A BILL

To appropriate amounts to the Department of Veterans Affairs to improve health care furnished by the Department, 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 “Strengthening Vet-  
5       erans Health Care Act of 2017”.

6       **SEC. 2. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

7       It is the sense of Congress that—

8               (1) the Veterans Access, Choice, and Account-  
9       ability Act of 2014 (Public Law 113–146) estab-  
10      lished the Veterans Choice Program under section

1 101 of such Act (Public Law 113–146; 38 U.S.C.  
2 1701 note) as a temporary program to address a  
3 wait time backlog for the receipt of health care from  
4 the Department of Veterans Affairs and a shortage  
5 of health care professionals at medical facilities of  
6 the Department;

7 (2) as of the date of the enactment of this Act,  
8 there are approximately 45,000 vacancies at the Vet-  
9 erans Health Administration; and

10 (3) of those vacancies, approximately 36,000  
11 are vacancies for positions relating to front line care  
12 for veterans.

13 **SEC. 3. APPROPRIATION OF AMOUNTS FOR HEALTH CARE**  
14 **FROM DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—There is authorized to be appro-  
16 priated, and is appropriated, to the Secretary of Veterans  
17 Affairs, out of any funds in the Treasury not otherwise  
18 appropriated, \$5,000,000,000 to carry out subsection (c).

19 (b) AVAILABILITY OF AMOUNTS.—The amount ap-  
20 propriated under subsection (a) shall be available for obli-  
21 gation or expenditure without fiscal year limitation.

22 (c) USE OF AMOUNTS.—The amount appropriated  
23 under subsection (a) shall be used by the Secretary as fol-  
24 lows:

1           (1) To increase the access of veterans to care  
2 as follows:

3           (A) To hire primary care and specialty  
4 care physicians for employment in the Depart-  
5 ment of Veterans Affairs.

6           (B) To hire other medical staff, including  
7 the following:

8           (i) Physicians.

9           (ii) Nurses.

10          (iii) Social workers.

11          (iv) Mental health professionals.

12          (v) Dental professionals.

13          (vi) Other health care professionals as  
14 the Secretary considers appropriate.

15          (C) To carry out the following:

16           (i) Section 7412 of title 38, United  
17 States Code.

18           (ii) Section 7302(e) of such title.

19           (iii) Section 301(b)(2) of the Veterans  
20 Access, Choice, and Accountability Act of  
21 2014 (Public Law 113–146; 38 U.S.C.  
22 7302 note).

23          (D) To pay for expenses, equipment, and  
24 other costs associated with the hiring of pri-  
25 mary care physicians, specialty care physicians,

1 and other medical staff under subparagraphs  
2 (A), (B), and (C).

3 (2) To improve the physical infrastructure of  
4 the Department as follows:

5 (A) To maintain and operate hospitals,  
6 nursing homes, domiciliary facilities, and other  
7 facilities of the Veterans Health Administra-  
8 tion.

9 (B) To enter into contracts or hire tem-  
10 porary employees to repair, alter, or improve fa-  
11 cilities under the jurisdiction of the Department  
12 that are not otherwise provided for under this  
13 paragraph.

14 (C) To carry out leases for facilities of the  
15 Department.

16 (D) To carry out minor construction  
17 projects of the Department.

18 (d) REPORT.—

19 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year  
20 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
21 retary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the appro-  
22 priate committees of Congress a report on how the  
23 Secretary has obligated the amount appropriated  
24 under subsection (a) as of the date of the submittal  
25 of the report.

1           (2) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS  
2       DEFINED.—In this subsection, the term “ appro-  
3       priate committees of Congress” means—

4           (A) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs  
5       and the Committee on Appropriations of the  
6       Senate; and

7           (B) the Committee on Veterans’ Affairs  
8       and the Committee on Appropriations of the  
9       House of Representatives.

10       (e) FUNDING PLAN.—The Secretary shall submit to  
11 Congress a funding plan describing how the Secretary in-  
12 tends to use the amount appropriated under subsection  
13 (a).

14 **SEC. 4. EMERGENCY DESIGNATIONS.**

15       (a) IN GENERAL.—This Act is designated as an  
16 emergency requirement pursuant to section 4(g) of the  
17 Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 (2 U.S.C. 933(g)).

18       (b) DESIGNATION IN SENATE.—In the Senate, this  
19 Act is designated as an emergency requirement pursuant  
20 to section 403(a) of S. Con. Res. 13 (111th Congress),  
21 the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year  
22 2010.

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